OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER™

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THE ULTIMATE SNES MINI GUIDE

WHY YOU SHOULD BE EXCITED ABOUT NINTENDO'S NEXT MINIATURE MASTERPIECE

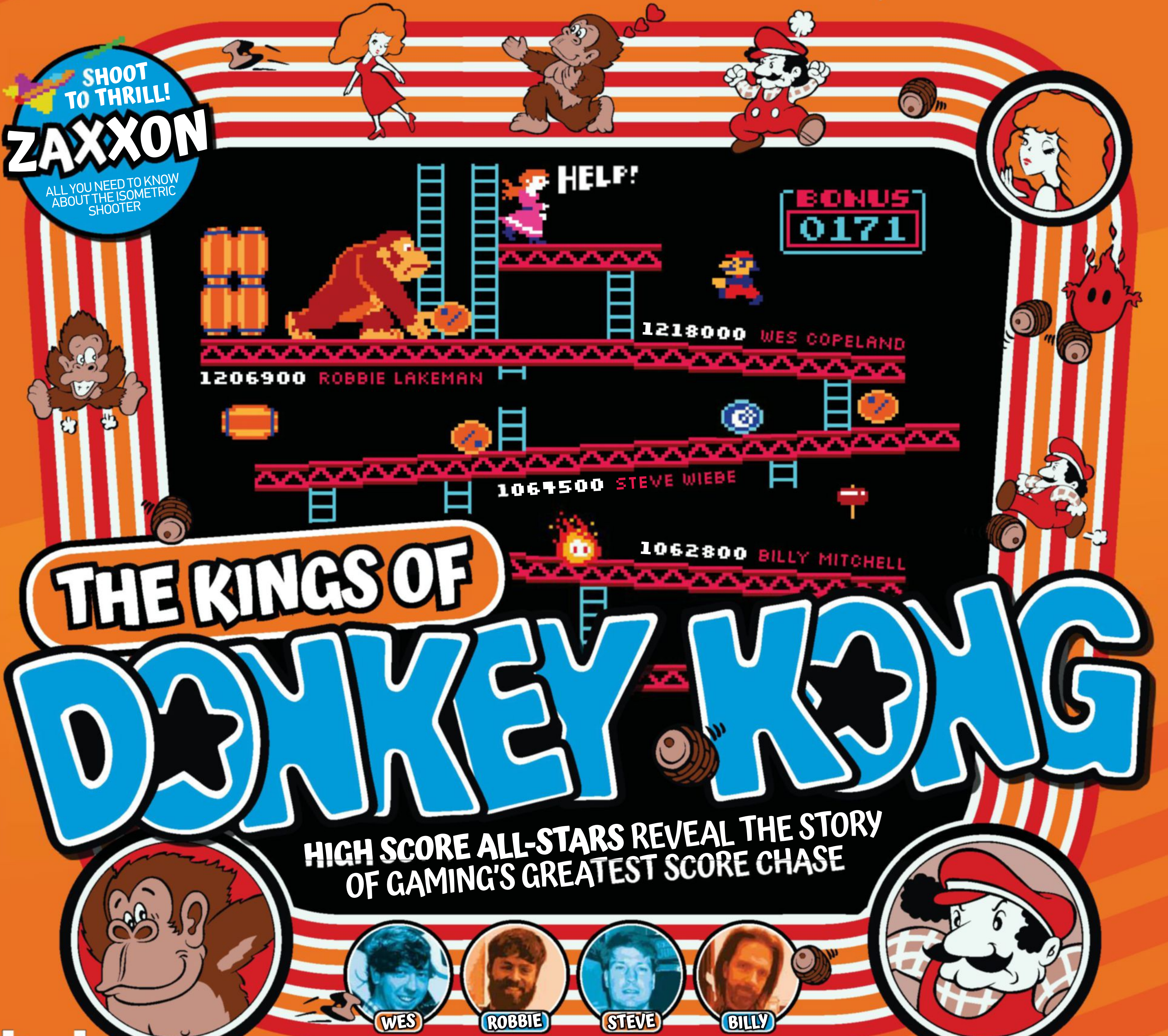
MAKING WILD GUNS

TOSHIYASU MIYABE TAKES US BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE HIGH-NOON CLASSIC

SHOOT TO THRILL!

ZAXXON

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE ISOMETRIC SHOOTER



THE KINGS OF DONKEY KONG

HIGH SCORE ALL-STARS REVEAL THE STORY OF GAMING'S GREATEST SCORE CHASE

Future

LOAD 171

ARCH RIVALS | SIMON PHIPPS | POCKETSTATION | SABOTEUR II | GAME BOY ADVANCE



THE RETROBATES DONKEY KONG HIGH SCORE



DARRAN JONES

44,800 It doesn't feel right playing via an emulator and on a keyboard, but it's a darn sight better than using an Xbox 360 pad.

Expertise:
Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine

Currently playing:
Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney

Favourite game of all time:
Strider



NICK THORPE

39,000 I'm pretty sure I'd have done better if good ol' DK hadn't bought a laser guidance system for those diagonal barrels, though.

Expertise:
Owning five Master Systems (I sold two)

Currently playing:
Puyo Puyo Tetris

Favourite game of all time:
Sonic The Hedgehog



DREW SLEEP

51,900 I'd like to think that it was my youthful reactions that have carried me in the upper percentile of Retrobates.

Expertise:
Quivering in fear at the endless list of RPGs to play this year.

Currently playing:
Persona 5, Final Fantasy XII, Fire Emblem Echoes

Favourite game of all time:
Final Fantasy VIII



SAM RIBBITS

55,300 With some practice and a little bit of luck, I reckon there's room for improvement here. This isn't over, Drury!

Expertise:
Drawing cats

Currently playing:
Pokémon Silver

Favourite game of all time:
Croc: Legend Of The Gobbos



DAVID CROOKES

15,500 I'm no Billy Mitchell and I forgot that raising the hammer above Mario's head doesn't stop a barrel from nobbling him.

Expertise:
Amstrad, Lynx, adventures, Dizzy and PlayStation (but is it retro? Debate!)

Currently playing:
Darwinia

Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



GRAEME MASON

18,400 People play this game for fun!?

Expertise:
Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver

Currently playing:
Call Of Cthulhu: Dark Corners Of The Earth

Favourite game of all time:
Resident Evil 4



PAUL DRURY

69,200 And I'll do better once I master the transition between girders four and five on the barrel screen. I have a palpable sense of relief every time I manage to get to the top hammer.

Expertise:
The star pattern

Currently playing:
Donkey Kong (obviously)

Favourite game of all time:
Donkey Kong



ANDREW FISHER

17,100 Always been terrible at it, but love the recent C64 remake by *Oxyron*.

Expertise:
Commodore 64 and Nintendo player for over 30 years

Currently playing:
Otokobe Ninja Colisseum

Favourite game of all time:
The Sentinel

LOADING...



Chasing after the high scores on my favourite games didn't become an obsession for me personally, but it was certainly something I could connect with, particularly when I really got into a game like *Space Harrier* or *Strider*. If I left the arcade and my initials 'DLJ' weren't on top of the leaderboard then I wasn't happy. Granted the scores would be erased if the machines were switched off, but that just meant I could reclaim them again the next time I visited.

Thanks to *The King Of Kong*, the obsession that drove the likes of Billy Mitchell and Steve Wiebe to compete for the highest score became a global event, and now, a decade later, the torch has been passed on to Wes Copeland and Robbie Lakeman who are the current champions and still competing against each other. We've interviewed all four men this issue to discover what it is about Nintendo's game that causes them to compete like they do and what it is that drove them all to become the King Of Kong.

If you couldn't care less about high score chasing then there's still plenty of interest this issue. Clive Townsend recalls the creation of *Saboteur II*, we chat with Simon Phipps about his fascinating career, take an in-depth look at Nintendo's SNES Mini and revisit the isometric arcade hit *Zaxxon*. There's plenty more retro goodness, but I'll let you discover it for yourself.

Enjoy the magazine!



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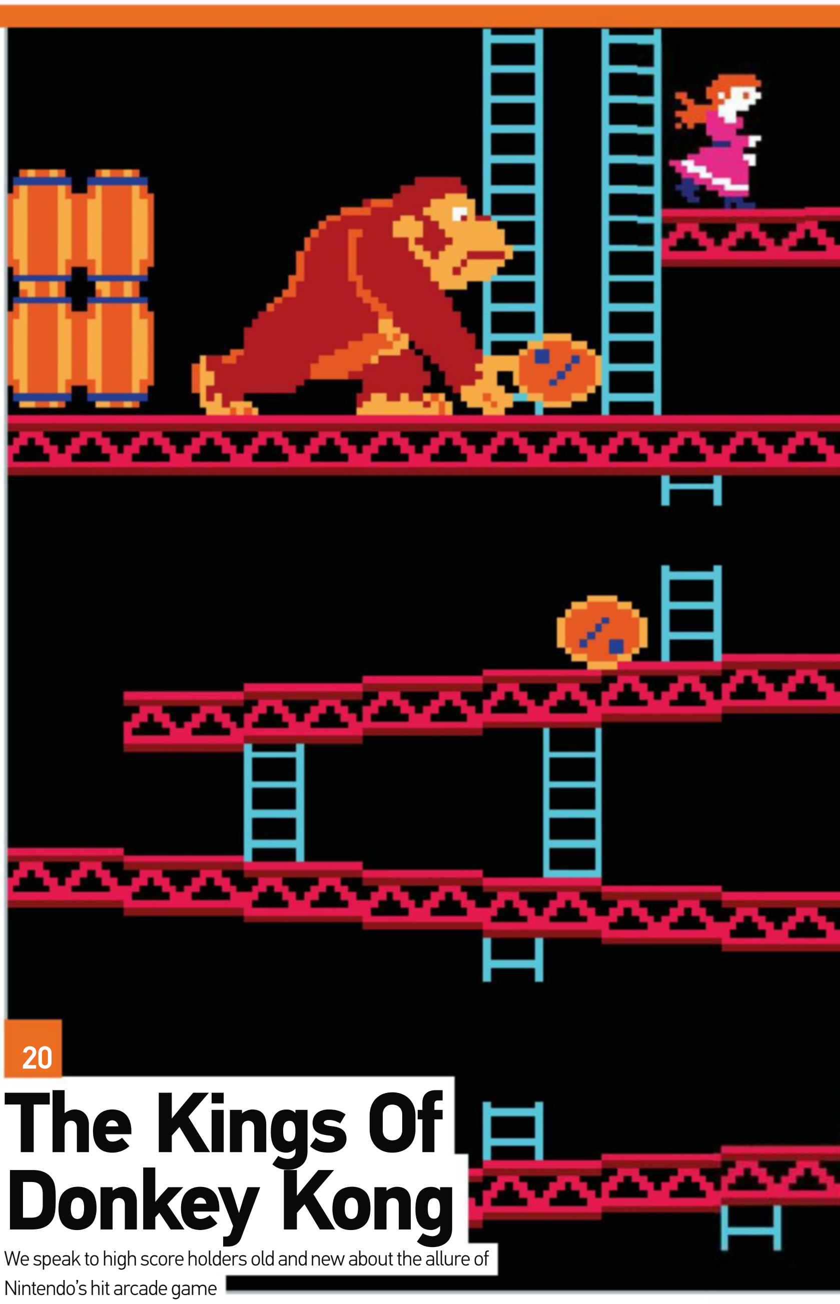
>> Load 171 Breathing new life into classic games

RETRO RADAR

REVIVALS



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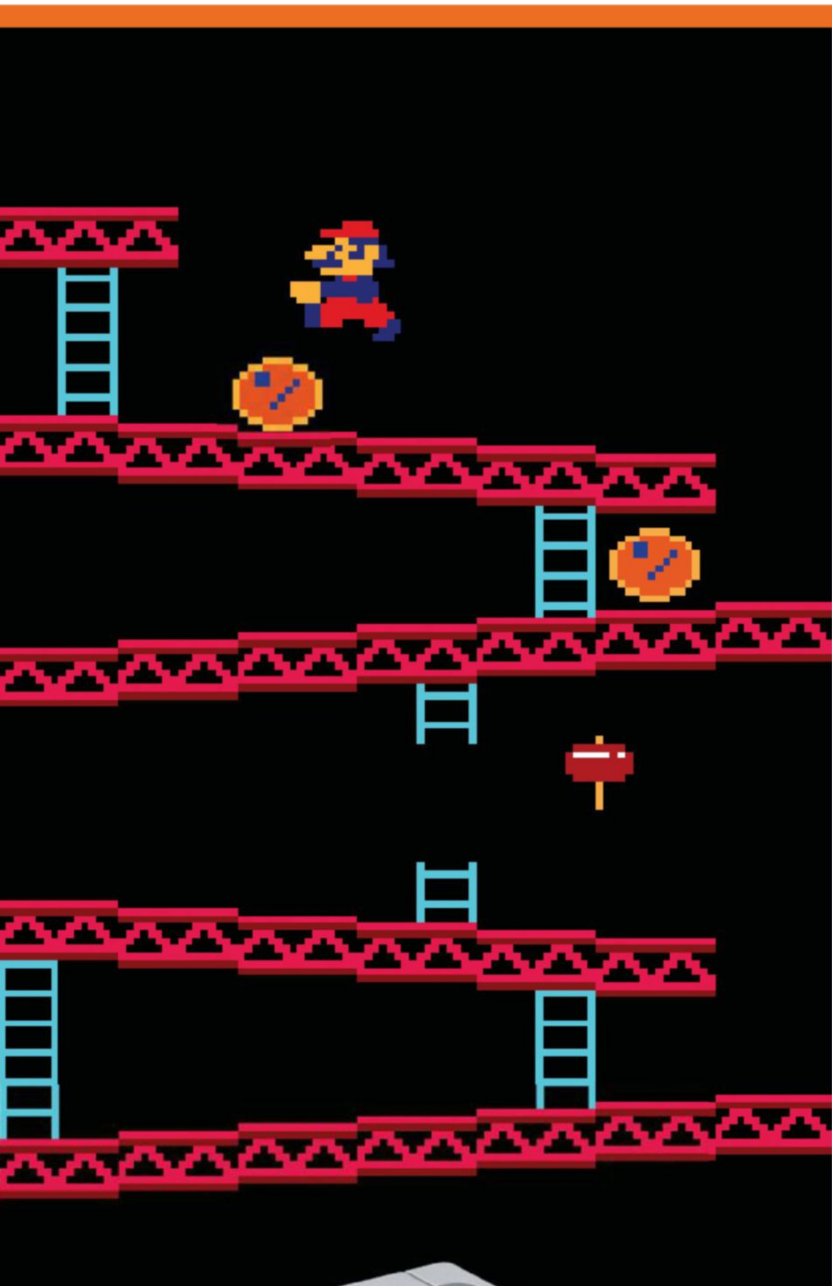
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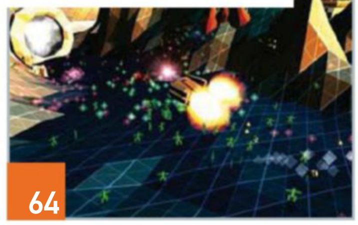
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darran.jones@futurenet.com









> “We spent all day making games, crunch hadn’t been invented”

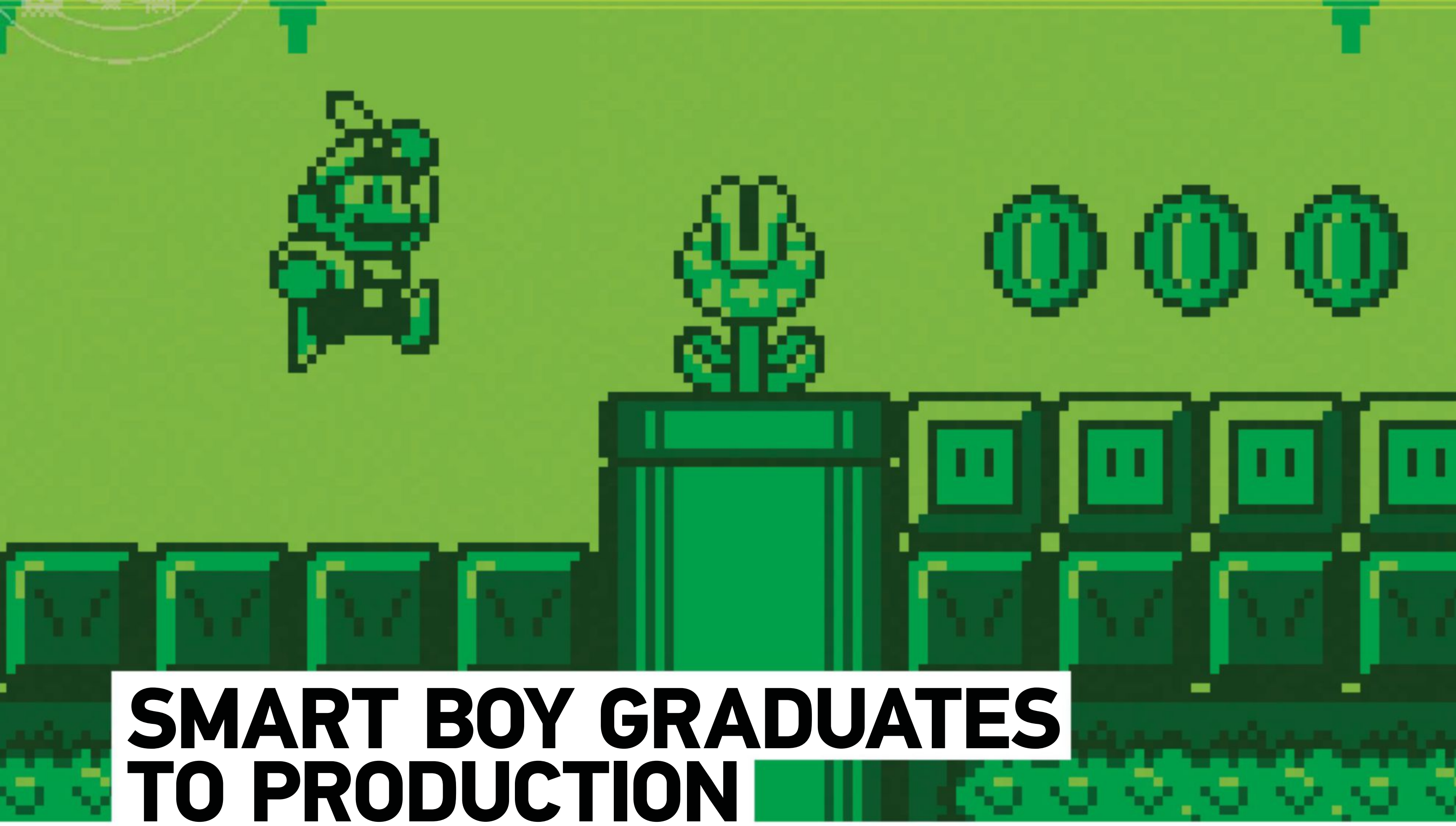


REVIEWS



ESSENTIALS





SMART BOY GRADUATES TO PRODUCTION

The accessory that turns your phone into a Game Boy is ready for retail

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After years of making clone hardware and accessories for retro gaming consoles, Hyperkin is about to break new ground with the release of the Smart Boy. The Smart Boy is a mobile phone accessory which effectively transforms your Android phone into a Game Boy Color, complete with physical controls and a cartridge port with which to play your original games. It's an intriguing development, so to find out more we spoke to Chris Gallizzi at Hyperkin.

The first thing we were curious to know was why the company didn't just make a dedicated handheld – something it has experience of doing through products such as the SupaBoy S. "We always wanted to touch mobile and this was an experiment for R&D," explains Chris. "It was a concept that I've been working on for a while." As it turns out, the idea wasn't one which gained immediate acceptance. "Unfortunately, my manager disagreed with the idea and we made a deal to treat it as an 'April Fools Joke' – if the post gathered enough traction it would be made into a real product." Fans were certainly enthusiastic, and in 2016 a development kit was released to allow technically-minded fans the opportunity to help shape and improve the device.



» [Game Boy Color] Bored of *Pokémon Go*? *Pokémon Gold & Silver* works properly, even with the clock feature.

The final retail version has now been revealed, and there are definite benefits of using the Smart Boy over the original Game Boy hardware. "The screens are backlit, [and the devices have] super crisp audio, great battery life," Chris summarises. In this regard, we can see the logic of piggybacking on phone technology rather than making a new device – if you're already carrying an awesome piece of hardware in your pocket, it makes sense to augment it rather than try to build a dedicated gaming device offering the same quality.

Chris is quick to point out another benefit – "The Smart Boy could be used as a USB controller when connected to your phone for other emulators and games." It's a tantalising prospect – touchscreen controls are a bugbear for many gamers, and the Smart Boy offers proper physical buttons that send their commands via the USB Type-C connection, rather than poking at the touchscreen. The company's website even states, "The Smart Boy is compatible with other apps and games, including GBA apps from Google Play. Configuration for such apps may vary."

Despite this compatibility, the Smart Boy doesn't offer native support for Game Boy Advance games – a surprising omission, given that a cartridge connector for Game Boy and Game Boy Color games is also capable of reading Game Boy Advance games. "The GBA cartridges are quite large and due to serial limitations it would take several minutes for GBA games to load on the device," Chris explains. We were also keen to know how the Smart Boy would handle additional cartridge features, and Chris revealed, "The real-time clock features would work – but not the external features of presented



» [Game Boy Color] *Pokémon Pinball* will likely work just fine, but without the benefit of rumble.



» The design looks odd at first, but it's grown on us.

> **"We have tried working with Apple on this several times but always meet a roadblock"**
> Chris Gallizzi

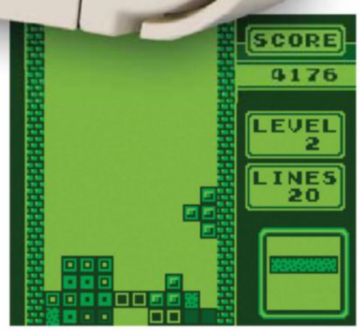
in other carts like the rumble feature." This means that *Pokémon Gold & Silver* should work as normal, with day turning to night in real time, but other games like *Kirby Tilt 'N' Tumble* and *Pokémon Pinball* will be missing features like tilt control and rumble.

Now that the final device specifications are known, we've noticed a number of features which may limit the audience for the system. For example, the phone is advertised as being designed for Samsung's S8 line and onwards. The body of the unit can expand to accommodate a variety of phones, but a USB Type-C plug is used to connect to the phone, excluding the many millions of Android phones out there still using Micro USB connections. "We did produce a Micro USB version of the Smart Boy – it was a devkit, but felt it was too much of an awkward port to support given so many phones have the port reversed or in different locations," explains Chris.

While working hard to support the smartphone market leader makes sense, we were also confused by the lack of an iPhone-compatible Smart Boy. In many respects, it would seem to be an easier product to market due to the relatively small number of different models in the iOS family. Chris tells us that the primary problem here is the hardware manufacturer itself. "We have tried working with Apple on this several times but always meet a roadblock," he laments. "A lot of it has to do with them allowing us full control over the Lightning port."

It's hard to gauge the potential for the Smart Boy, as nothing quite like it has ever come to market before. If you're holding on to a large collection of Game Boy cartridges and have a phone that will accommodate the Smart Boy, we can definitely see how you'd go for a classic game of *Tetris* with proper controls over a modern app with touch controls and adverts. However, it's going to be interesting to see if such a device can thrive in the diverse and tumultuous smartphone market, given the very specific physical design needed to support the Smart Boy.

The Smart Boy is due for release in September 2017 for £59.99.



» [Game Boy] Who needs apps with ads and touch controls? We'll take the cartridge, thanks.



» [Game Boy Color] *Tumble* likely won't work due to a lack of support for that game's built-in tilt sensor.

CONSOLES IN DISGUISE

In the spirit of the Smart Boy, here are the original devices that turned your console into another console…



Expansion Module #1, *ColecoVision*
How do you get players to upgrade from their existing console? A good way is to ensure they can bring their games with them, and Coleco did just that by manufacturing this add-on which gave the ColecoVision compatibility with Atari 2600 games and controllers. Needless to say, Atari was deeply unhappy about one of its competitors cloning its hardware and quickly issued a lawsuit. The case was settled out of court, resulting in Coleco paying royalties on the hardware.

bleemcast!, *Dreamcast*
Having successfully emulated PlayStation games on PC, emulation company bleem! decided to target the Dreamcast next. Games ran at high resolution with texture filtering and improved colour, and the original plan was for discs to support a large number of games. Eventually the company decided on specialised single-game discs, getting *Tekken 3*, *Metal Gear Solid* and *Gran Turismo 2* onto shelves before Sony hit bleem! with legal action that it couldn't afford to fight against.



RetroGen, *SNES*
This relatively recent development allows the heresy of playing Mega Drive games on a SNES. The device draws its power and control inputs from the SNES console, but if you're playing on an original console, you have to run separate AV cables from the cartridge to the TV as the cartridge can't access the SNES video display hardware. However, a number of SNES clone consoles are able to display the RetroGen through their standard AV outputs.

HOW MUCH?!

THE STORY BEHIND THE £3,380 MEGA DRIVE GAME

When David Amor put up a job lot of Mega Drive games that he had from his time working at EA he had no idea that the collection contained an incredibly rare PAL version of *Lakers Vs Celtics And The NBA Playoffs*, which never received an official release over here in Europe. Here he tells us about finding the game that eventually sold for a staggering £3,380.

What did you do when you were at Electronic Arts?

I was a producer at Elelectronic Arts from 1994 to 2001. Sometimes that meant overseeing production on games such as *Space Hulk*, other times that might be the liaison between developer and publisher on a game like *Theme Park*. Later on in my time there I worked on games on site, including *Dungeon Keeper 2*.





» [Mega Drive] While 192 PAL copies were manufactured, only 13 are known to have surfaced.

How did you come into contact with the game?

A good friend that worked with me at EA had a lot of sealed games dating back from 1982, which he received while overseeing EA's publishing operation. He now lives in California and was selling his UK house, so he asked if I'd help him with these games. There was a lot more than I could fit in my car, and as far as I can tell another friend of his took the rest.

Do you have any other games from your time at EA?

I'm not really a hoarder, so I binned everything I was given some time ago. Having spoken with collectors recently, I realise I would have done well to have kept some of the more fun items such as special editions and preproduction prototypes. The games I've been selling for my friend have varied: Apple II, C64, Amiga, PC, 3DO, PSone, Saturn, Genesis. Generally the old, sealed, gatefold Amiga games such as *Bard's Tale* have been getting a good price – around £120 each.





» [Mega Drive] The likes of *Lakers* and *FIFA* were instrumental in building EA's reputation on Sega's console.

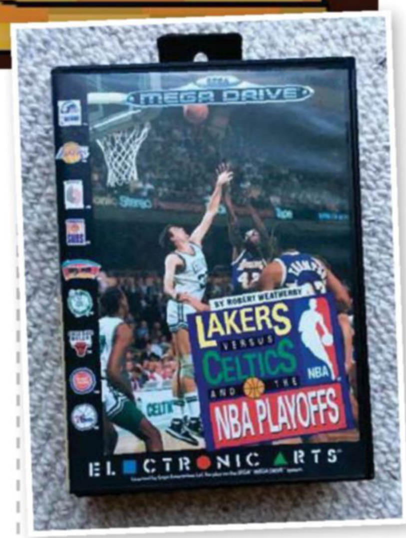
> "On a whim, I decided to put them up as a job lot on eBay"
> David Amor

When did you realise this particular Mega Drive game might be worth money?

I had a big batch of Mega Drive games. 120 of them. At first I asked CEX, which told me to check on the website for their value. After checking a few, which were about £3 each, I figured that maybe I'd give them to a charity shop instead. On a whim, I decided to put them up as a job lot on eBay and shortly after people starting enquiring about the *Lakers Vs Celtics* game. I ran it through Google and it became clear that I had a rare game.



» [Mega Drive] Although it focuses on the Lakers and Celtics, other basketball teams are featured.



» It's the PAL packaging that makes this game so desirable. If you just want to play it a standard cart costs very little.

What were the issues that stopped the game from reaching a wide audience to begin with?

That's a long and tangled tale, the details of which have been lost in the sands of time. I spoke to a number of EA employees and as best we can remember we translated and printed the manual then made the sleeve before finding there was a licensing issue that wasn't resolved in Europe. The original plan was to create a generic *EA Basketball* game with the NBA licence removed, but eventually that idea was shelved. 192 copies made it into the wild, but no one quite remembers how that happened.

Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath Soundtrack

Composed by Michael Bross, the soundtrack of the last *Oddworld* game is so vast it's been spread across two brightly-coloured LPs. The orange and yellow vinyl feature 25 tracks from the game and are accompanied by stunning artwork, including an absolutely glorious looking gatefold. Sadly, the Limited Run version that was limited to just 450 copies is no longer available to buy.

Price: €32 **From:** blackscreenrecords.limitedrun.com

Breakin' The Borders

With so many publishers choosing to focus on the more commercially popular Amiga, it's great to see a tome dedicated to the Atari ST. The first of several planned volumes, *Breakin' The Borders* concentrates on the ST's vibrant demo scene and the people and companies that sprung from it. It offers tremendous insight into the scene and features fascinating interviews with numerous members, including The Exceptions, TNT, Gigabyte Crew and The Lost Boys. An essential read for anyone interested in the machine.

Price: €39.90 **From:** microzeit.com



New Nintendo 2DS XL

There's been a selection of great 3DS games recently, so it's fitting that there is a new console to enjoy them on. Nintendo's latest upgrade is virtually identical to the 2015 3D version, but moves the speakers and the power button and is slightly slimmer overall. It retains the same additional controls, Amiibo support and processing power meaning you can finally enjoy playing SNES games on the go. The only thing it does lack is a 3D display.

Price: £129.99
From: nintendo.co.uk

PICK OF THE MONTH

The Ultimate Retro Collection

Imagine a magazine that was dedicated to all things retro and not just videogames. It might not exist at the moment, but our brand-new bookazine is easily the best alternative, as it's absolutely chock-full of amazing retro content covering everything from movies to board games. Teddy Ruxpin, Transformers, My Little Pony and He-Man are just a few of the classic toys featured, while gadgets such as the NES, Speak & Spell and Sony Walkman are also covered. We've also included gigantic articles on *Star Wars* and the best films and music from the Eighties, ensuring that you've got plenty to read in this 148-page book.

Price: £9.99 **From:** Whsmith/Barnes & Noble

Lemmings Duo Mug

If you've ever wanted to sip from a Lemming without fear of being reprimanded by an animal rights activist then this is your chance. This stylish looking mug is not only officially licensed but is capable of holding 10 oz of your favourite beverage. It's also dishwasher and microwave safe, meaning you can continually wash those lovable characters without fear of them ever being rubbed away.

Price: £9.99
From: funstockretro.co.uk


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Here's my bio... Paul Rose
Paul Rose is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator and chief writer of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes for kids TV, but can still be found rambling on about games, old and new, for his daily website, Digitiser2000.com.

When Games Were Games

Why do you play videogames? I suspect that the answer – if we really dug down and asked some hard questions – would be different for each of us.

I realised recently that games, for me, are a form of meditation. I've tried proper hippy-drippy, sit-around-and-breathe meditation, and I can't quiet my brain long enough to shut it down from all thoughts.

Relaxing and doing nothing is something I've struggled with my whole life. I'd rather go on holiday to a city than sit on a beach for two weeks. There have been times when I've wondered – as you probably are right now – if I've got ADD, but I don't really feel the need to put a label on it.

I mean, it has its advantages (I can have a lot of projects on the go at any one time), but also its disadvantages (I tend to work myself to the point of exhaustion). Games have always acted as a firebreak for me; the moment when I'm able to hit the pause button and just stop. Well… while shooting at things. They're a release valve, and without them I'd probably be buggered.

Realising this recently, I linked it to my general disdain for cutscenes in modern games. It always confused me that I didn't like cutscenes, because I'm quite happy to sit through a two-hour movie, without also needing to simultaneously be juggling half a dozen lobsters.

However, I think what happens with cutscenes is that they pull me out of that Zen, meditative, state. I get into a rhythm with a game, and then suddenly I have to suffer through a load of CGI plebs trying to justify everything I've been doing for the last 20 minutes. You don't get it the other way around. You don't get ten minutes into a new Marvel movie, only for the picture to freeze and be asked to pick up your controller for an interactive, playable, cutscene. It'd take you out of the film.

Games, back when we all first started playing them, kept such narrative guff to an absolute minimum. Admittedly, that was as much through the restriction of the technology as any conscious creative choice, but just because the technology exists to do something doesn't mean we should do it.

For my money, games work better when their narrative is contained – either in the gameplay, or in the player's head. *Ant Attack* never felt the need to give you the backstory of Antescher. You never knew the motivations of Boy and Girl. It gave you a setting, some controls, and you did the rest. There's something deeply condescending about a cutscene, and for those of us of a certain vintage we never got into gaming – not action gaming anyway – because of the story. Frankly, I find the intrusion of a story into my meditation nothing short of a bit rude.

I miss that there aren't more big games, which try to keep the lessons of the past in mind; games weren't always like that because they were older, cruder, and less advanced. Sometimes they were like that because they knew they were games. ✱



Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag darran.jones@futurenet.com

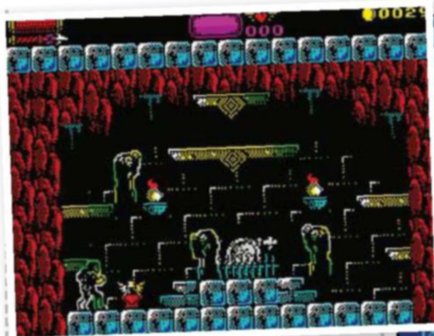


George Cropper

The Spectrum superfan and YouTuber talks about his homebrew publishing label

FOR MORE INFORMATION HEAD TO
BUMFUNGAMING.COM

If you're a fan of the Spectrum community scene then George Cropper will be a name that's instantly familiar to you. Originally known for his Funkyspectrum YouTube channel (which is still running) George has now moved into publishing Spectrum homebrew games and his website, Bumfun Gaming, is quickly becoming one of the premier sites for interesting new Spectrum games. We caught up with George to find out how it all happened.



» [ZX Spectrum] *Castlevania: Spectral Interlude* received rave reviews on release, and deservedly so.

Why start publishing games?

I run the Funkyspectrum YouTube channel and kept getting sent new titles for the ZX Spectrum to review. This led to a well-known and very talented music composer in the demo scene, Yerzmyey, sending me his *Crapbert* game. He said it was nothing much and probably wouldn't be of interest to me but when I played it, I thought, 'Wow. It's a great game, really addictive and has a pounding, intense soundtrack that perfectly matches the frenetic gameplay.' It was then that I thought to myself, 'Why not just release this, for people who'd be interested in a physical copy?' After discussing this, it was greenlit and as soon as it had been decided I started to contact other authors of great homebrew titles that I was aware of and soon we had several high-quality games ready for release.

Why focus on the ZX Spectrum?

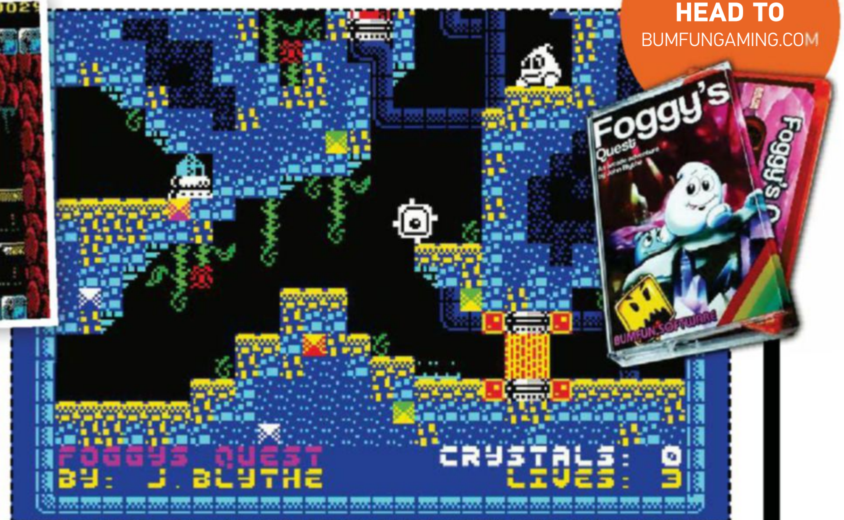
There's a very active homebrew community for the ZX Spectrum and it was, initially, the primary focus of my YouTube channel, so I'm in contact with a lot of people in that scene. However, we will be featuring titles for other systems shortly. This was always our goal. Past attempts to get other systems (especially retro consoles) on board have been much more difficult due to the costs of cart production. I can say, though, that we will be expanding into C64 and Jupiter Ace titles very soon!

How do you go about choosing games for the website?

We either contact authors directly to produce games for us or check the pulse of the community. When it starts racing due to a particular title we will contact that developer to see if they're interested in working with us to release it.



» [ZX Spectrum] *The Dark* is an incredible looking Spectrum game, highlighting just what's possible on the micro.



» [ZX Spectrum] John Blythe's *Foggy's Quest* is a loving tribute to the platformers of old.

> "Our versions of Saboteur and Saboteur II, which were rejigged by the author himself"
> Geroge Cropper

Who are the most interesting developers working in homebrew at the moment?

Robin Verhagen-Guest is doing some really great exclusive work for us that will be coming out soon. One of these is a port of a 2600 classic. He's extremely talented and a lovely person. I've always been really impressed with what Andrew Vanbeck does, too. He's very versatile. Then there is the Rewind team from Russia: their work is incredible. Denis Grachev is also very talented. Andy Johns, John Blythe and the ever-prolific Rafal Miazga, too. Also David Saphier. He's done some incredible work behind the scenes on a lot of our titles and does great work for the community.

What games are you most proud of and why?

Our versions of *Saboteur* and *Saboteur II*, which were rejigged by the author himself, Clive Townsend. A real legend of the ZX Spectrum who did a lot of work to update these titles specially for us. I love *Dead Flesh Boy*, too, as Andrew added extras for our version and also *Wanderers*, for which I did a completely new English translation. That was a lot of fun to work on.

Why do you think the Spectrum remains so popular?

It formed a large part of a lot of childhoods. Unlike consoles, you could actually program but also play the latest games. These games had a very distinct look and came from a time when gameplay was more important than gigabytes of flashy textures. In many ways, along with other systems from that era, it represents gaming distilled down to its purest form and many Spectrum games remain challenging, fun experiences.

What can you tell us about Next Level?

It is our new label coming very soon and will focus on releasing titles exclusively for the upcoming ZX Spectrum Next computer. We're all really excited about this.

What future plans do you have for the website?

Well, it's just been completely overhauled by my friend Jan who's done a great job so the dust is just settling on that but you never know – I'm always tinkering with things, so who knows what might happen! *

DISCUSS

What's your favourite controller?

Forum
www.retrogamer.net/forum

■ Kempston joystick for the Spectrum. You can keep your Quickshots. This is the best.
AceGrace

■ Competition Pro 5000 in its black-and-red incarnation, usable on just about any 8/16-bit computer, which is just as well as it'll outlast them all.
Antiriad2097

■ It's funny, I used to loathe gamepads and only ever used joysticks, but having been introduced to the Xbox 360 controller – and recently the wireless version – well, there's no turning back, is there?
ncf1

■ Either of the official Sega Saturn pads, although if they would add a Mega Drive d-pad to them that would be perfect.
Eric

■ I still have the Suzo Arcade stick for my Commodore 64/ Amiga. That stick is built like a tank
Doddsy

Twitter
twitter.com/@RetroGamer_mag

■ Quickshot II Turbo. I got it along with my C64 for Christmas 1985 and it has remained my firm favourite ever since.
@aaronub4t

■ During *Sensible Soccer*'s development Konix Speed Kings were flavour of the month, but personally I preferred the Zip Stick – awesome stick, man!
@StooCambridge

■ Nothing beats an arcade stick, so mine is the Sega Power Stick, if only it had six buttons instead of three.
@gamepopper

■ Microsoft Sidewinder 3D Pro from 1996. Got me through many hours of *TIE Fighter*.
@trioptimum

■ Has to be the original digital PlayStation pad. The sticks of the dual shock used to get in the way when I was whupping ass on *Tekken 3*.
@wleigh85

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■ Most complex one I own is the *Steel Battalion* twin-stick behemoth. Most enjoyable one is a NegCon with *WipEout*.
Richard Marshall

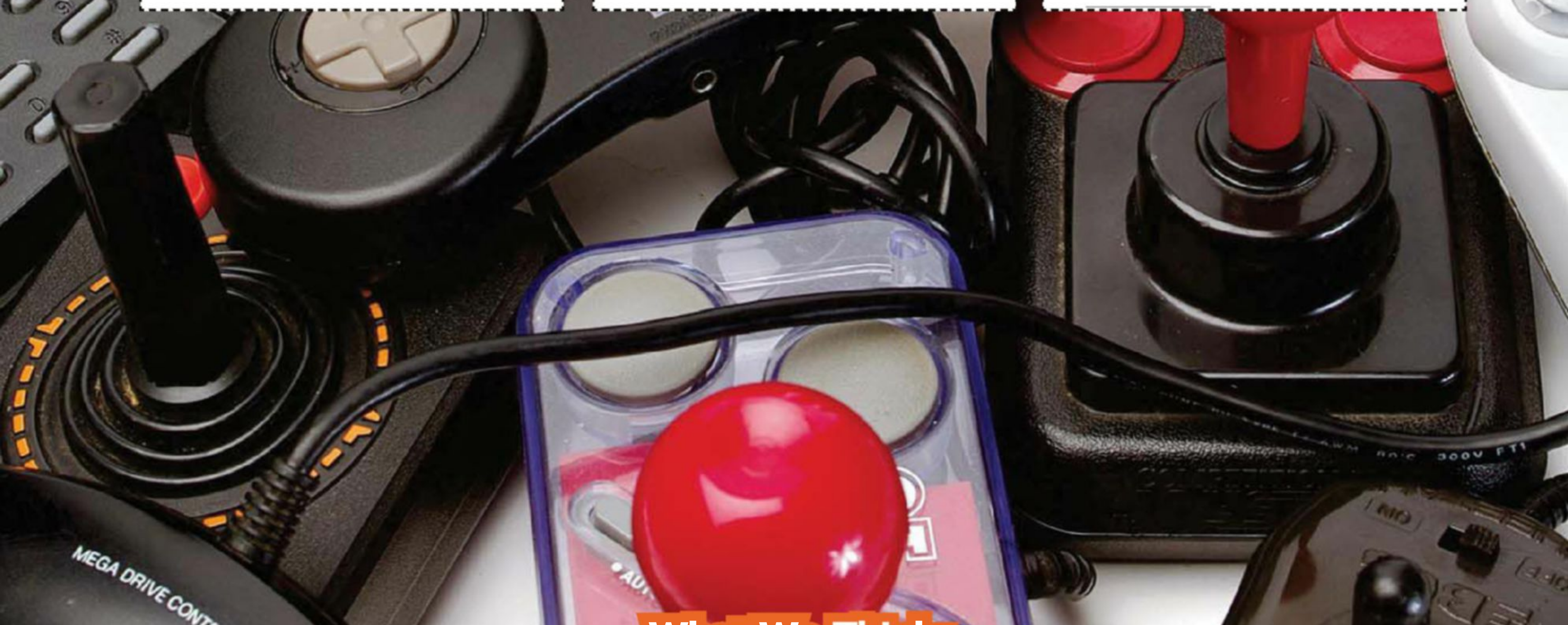
■ Kempston yesterday, today and tomorrow. Hail to the king, baby.
Robert Harkin

■ Gonna say I've never found better than the PSone DualShock. Solid as a rock, still works 20 years later, built for a mauling. Outstanding.
Mike McGrath Bryan

■ The Atari Jaguar pad deserves a special mention for being able to show kids how to work a touchtone telephone.
Brian Hooper

■ The SNES pad is the perfect videogame controller. Snug in the hand with its subtle angles, comfy curves and silky soft press. No button wasted but no button missing, either.
Martin Perry

■ I always liked the Atari VCS sticks.
Andrew Wilkinson



What We Think

Darran
■ Capcom's, frankly, ridiculous controller it created for *Steel Battalion*. Using it to pilot your VT is one of the most compelling experiences you can have in a videogame.

Nick
■ I have two Neo-Geo CD arcade sticks for my Neo-Geo MVS machine. The click of the microswitches is marvellous, and I prefer the button layout over the AES stick.

Drew
■ Modern controllers have years of iteration behind them, so it'll be silly not to go for the DS4 or Xbox One pad. Their clicky buttons throw me off, though. Bring back the pressure buttons!

Sam
■ If the Game Boy Advance were a joypad… Outside of hypotheticals, though, I'd have to stick with the Xbox One pad. Or maybe the original PlayStation pad if I'm feeling sentimental.



NOKIA N-GAGE
"I always wanted an N-Gage. I realise it wasn't the best system or the best phone but it has an odd charm to it."
PAID: £25

SEALED POKÉMON GAMES
"I was just about the right age when the *Pokémon* craze hit. When I first started collecting, the prices hadn't shot up yet so I could pick up new-old stock for cheap. I soon had all three sealed Game Boy games."
PAID: £90

MEGA YARN YOSHI
"I entered a Nintendo competition to make a stop-motion Yoshi video. The prize was a Mega Yarn Yoshi signed by the producers of the *Yoshi's Woolly World*."
PAID: £0

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

MIGHTY MORPHIN' POWER RANGERS
"It may not be a very good game, but I have a sealed copy of *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers* that's signed by the actors who played the original Red, Blue and Black Rangers."
PAID: £10

BIO

NAME: Matt Fisher

ESTIMATED VALUE: A lifetime of memories

FAVOURITE SYSTEM: Game Boy

FAVOURITE GAME: *Kirby: Planet Robobot*



"THE GAME BOY WAS ALWAYS MY FAVOURITE SYSTEM AS IT WAS THE FIRST THAT WAS REALLY MINE"

The Handheld Hero

Readers take us through the retro keyhole

One of the biggest triggers we've noticed with collectors is that collecting is a way to connect with their younger selves. Sometimes, though, a reader gets back into collecting for a different reason, as was the case with Matt Fisher.

"I started when I was about 20," he recalls. "I had a few health issues and went through a bit of an early-onset midlife crisis and started buying up games from my childhood. I moved to a tiny flat in London so didn't really have the room for a collection but when I got married and moved to a bigger house my wife agreed that I could have my own home-studio to start a retro gaming YouTube channel. It went from there."

While some collectors have a scattershot approach to their collections, some like to focus on specific systems and Matt's particular poison is Nintendo's very first handheld. "The Game Boy was always my favourite system as it was the first that was really mine," Matt tells us. "My sisters and I shared an Atari ST but when the Game Boy came out, that took over. As it had such a long life, it often reinvented itself. Just as everyone thought it had run its course, the *Pokémon* craze hit. There's such a vast library of amazing games, from the original all the way through to the GBA."

Nintendo consoles are notoriously expensive to collect for, so we were keen to know if Matt was happy with cartridges or if everything needed to be in as desirable a condition as possible. "I do tend to go for complete-in-box when it comes to Game Boy games as I like to preserve the games I loved – especially when the boxes and manuals were often thrown away," he confirms. "With other systems I'm not as bothered, but I love to have the manuals as they often contained the story, a background on the characters and some great artwork as well."

Matt feels that it's still possible to get good bargains, even if it is becoming harder and harder. "Not everything has gone up in value," he explains. "There are a few obscure games that aren't popular that have stayed at a reasonable price. With the rest of the games having become a little too pricey, a little more patience is required." Matt is also fortunate that he has a local store nearby, which gives him flexibility when he's collecting. "Most people that go in aren't as bothered about boxes and manuals, so I can often find things I'm looking for that have been tucked away in the back room."

Matt's final advice is worth heeding as he's aware how expensive collecting can be. "Collect what you want, not what's rare. Some of the best games are fairly common and won't break the bank." *



KIRBY'S DREAM COLLECTION
"I was gutted when I found out we weren't getting a release of *Kirby's Dream Collection* on the Wii. I bought an American Wii and imported an NTSC copy of the game."
PAID: $45

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

JULY 2000 – All eyes were on America this month, as the world's developers and publishers converged upon Los Angeles for the gargantuan E3 conference. Whose future looked the brightest? Let's go back in time to find out...





NEWS JULY 2000

The French national football team confirmed its standing at the top of the football world on 2 July, with David Trezeguet scoring the golden goal in extra time for a 2-1 victory over Italy. Of the UK's nations, only England had qualified for the tournament cohosted by Belgium and the Netherlands. Though the team beat Germany, losses to Portugal and Romania saw England crash out in the group stage.

The first series of the reality series *Big Brother* made its debut on Channel 4 on 14 July. Ten contestants moved into a custom house to live together under surveillance, with the goal of surviving eviction votes to win £70,000. Nick Bateman was disqualified from the show after attempting to influence eviction nominations, and builder Craig Phillips won the grand prize.

The supersonic airliner Concorde was involved in a fatal crash for the first time. Air France Flight 4590 was scheduled to fly from Paris to New York on 25 July, but suffered a fatal accident as it took off from Charles de Gaulle Airport. The plane ran over a metal strip on the runway, puncturing the aircraft's tyre and flying into the wing of the aircraft, rupturing a fuel tank. Unable to abort takeoff, the plane crashed into a hotel as the pilots attempted an emergency landing, killing all 109 passengers and four hotel staff.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM JULY 2000

After a busy week in the LA sun, the topic on the lips of every games journalist was Konami's incredible trailer for *Metal Gear Solid 2*, which showed returning protagonist Solid Snake running around a ship and taking out guards. "Everything you've seen on PlayStation 2 so far is just an appetiser," exclaimed *CVG*, which believed that Konami's latest "may be the finest videogame ever." While Snake's new moves drew attention, including the ability to hang off railings and turn and shoot from cover, praise was mainly focused on the game's apparent graphical prowess. *CVG* invited its readers to, "Imagine the original improved tenfold and rendered up in cinema-beating visuals." *Arcade* noted that, "Rain has been done in games before but never like this. It was blown in all directions by the wind and the water bounced off Snake's body." According to *Edge*, "Everyone your correspondent talked to mentioned the same symptoms – hairs raising on the back of the neck and goose pimples," though it did take care to mention that "the sequence has been expertly edited to resemble a Hollywood actioner [...], with few true in-game moments." Despite the effusive praise attracted by the game, Hideo Kojima was critical of the PlayStation 2 hardware running it, claiming that he was "actually expecting something much better".

Kojima wasn't the only critic. Despite having the biggest exclusive game of the show, Sony's software lineup was considered to be rather underwhelming, with *Timesplitters*, *Zone Of The Enders* and *Midnight Club* proving to be the highlights of what *Edge* called "a wretched E3" for the market leader. The magazine's verdict was that the games on show were "so far off the mark Sony originally claimed its 128-bit machine capable of that you could forgive those beginning to doubt the PS2's true computing muscle". *Arcade* concurred, opining that, "There was nothing that screamed 'the future of digital entertainment' – just PlayStation games with nice graphics." The problem appeared to be technical in nature, according to *Edge*. "Everywhere

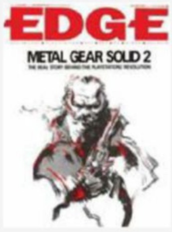


[PS2] This cinematic incarnation of Snake has come a long way from his MSX2 debut.



[N64] Who's this vomiting lout? Why it's Conker, last seen being entirely inoffensive in *Diddy Kong Racing*.

THIS MONTH IN…



Edge

"Do you think there's a chance Nintendo might rerelease the SNES?" That was the question on the mind of reader Steve Virgo, who had broken his SNES after punching it during a game of *F-Zero*. 17 years later, we can definitively say that Nintendo will – you just might have to wait a while.



Arcade

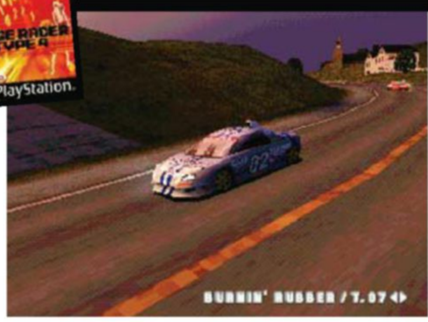
"It's the third most searched for word on the internet, after MP3 and – chortle – sex." But what word was it? The answer is *Pokémon*! *Arcade* helpfully put together a bluffer's guide to allow its confused adult audience to muddle through the phenomenon, including the above statistic as an indication of popularity.



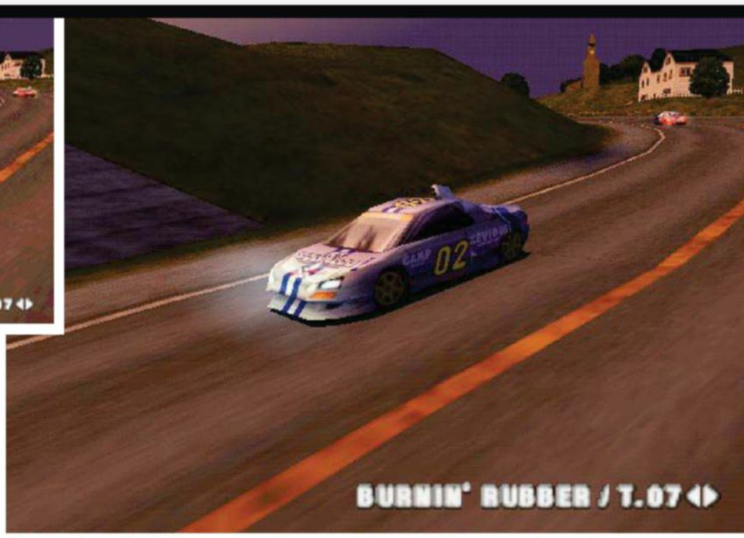
Computer & Video Games

"Go retro for free" says the contents page, so naturally we're interested. "It's called emulation, and it won't make you go blind." Despite *CVG*'s embrace of emulators, it does note that obtaining games is "a bit of a legal minefield" – but it actually explains the law incorrectly. Oops!





[PlayStation] Here's *Ridge Racer Type 4*, running as intended on a regular PlayStation…



[Dreamcast] …and here's the same game on Dreamcast via bleem! – a sight guaranteed to upset Sony.

you turned there would be a developer complaining of the difficulties involved in programming Sony's new hardware," the magazine observed.

Sony still showed some commitment to the immensely popular PlayStation, in spite of the hype. The older machine was to receive a hardware revamp known as the PSone, a considerably smaller machine that would replace the existing form factor introduced in 1994. The system also had no shortage of high-profile games at E3, though most were follow-ups to existing hits. *Medal Of Honor: Underground, Dino Crisis 2, Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2, Driver 2* and *Parasite Eve 2* were some of the many sequels on show, with Neversoft's *Spider-Man* as the only high profile original game on display.

Sticking to its usual plan of playing by its own rules, Nintendo chose not to reveal further details of its upcoming Dolphin and Game Boy Advance consoles. Instead, the company focused on its sales powerhouse *Pokémon* and a message that, "N64 is the platform to own in 2000." Opinions were split – *Arcade* felt that "they actually backed this seemingly ludicrous claim with some brilliant games", but *Edge* felt that the offering was "embarrassingly thin". *Dinosaur Planet* was the big new game, a *Zelda*-style adventure featuring furry animals Sabre and Krystal. *Conker's Bad Fur Day* was a world apart from *Twelve Tales: Conker 64*, as the formerly cutesy squirrel had become far more foul-mouthed and violent than his Rare stablemates. *Banjo-Tooie, Mickey's Speedway USA, Mario Tennis, The Legend Of Zelda: Majora's Mask* and *Eternal Darkness* were the other highlights of Nintendo's stand.

If there was a victor at E3, it was Sony's key rival in the next generation console battle. "It was over on the Sega stand that the widest range of quality titles were to be found," *Edge* noted. "It was Sega who stole the show," agreed *Arcade*. "Their stand had far and away the best quality and variety on show – some great first and third party titles and a game for everyone." Sega was keen to highlight the games that would deliver on the machine's promise of excellent online gaming, including *Quake III: Arena, Phantasy Star Online* and *Outtrigger*. Even for those of us not willing to rack up gigantic phone bills, there was plenty to look forward to: *Sonic Adventure 2, Shenmue, Metropolis Street Racer, Space Channel 5, Jet Set Radio, Half-Life, Virtua Tennis, Ferrari F355 Challenge* and more. Despite this strong showing, the Dreamcast's future wasn't looking entirely rosy. "Dreamcast titles are notably absent from the



[Dreamcast] *Shenmue* was one of Sega's big hitters, even after being available in Japan for six months.

majority of third-party publishers' 2001 schedules," noted *Edge*. "PlayStation 2 development has quietly bled Dreamcast dry of new games."

Though Sony's new console was stealing Sega's lunch, the emulation company bleem! was making waves by putting its past hits on the Dreamcast. Having already made a PlayStation emulator for the PC, the company's next trick was to run PlayStation games on the Dreamcast. The results were impressive – the games ran at a higher resolution than on the original hardware, with added texture filtering and improved colour handling. How would Sony and Sega respond to this? Find out in a future edition of Back To The Noughties… *

CHARTS

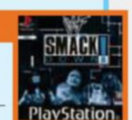
JULY 2000

NINTENDO 64



1 Pokémon Stadium (Nintendo)
2 Star Wars Episode I: Racer (LucasArts)
3 The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time (Nintendo)
4 Super Mario 64 (Nintendo)
5 GoldenEye 007 (Nintendo)

PLAYSTATION



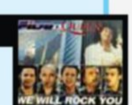
1 WWF Smackdown (THQ)
2 Euro 2000 (Electronic Arts)
3 Star Wars: Jedi Power Battles (LucasArts)
4 Rayman (Ubisoft)
5 Tomb Raider III (Eidos)

DREAMCAST



1 Resident Evil: Code Veronica (Eidos)
2 V-Rally 2: Expert Edition (Infogrames)
3 MDK2 (Interplay)
4 Zombie Revenge (Sega)
5 Crazy Taxi (Sega)

MUSIC



1 We Will Rock You (Five & Queen)
2 Life Is A Rollercoaster (Ronan Keating)
3 2 Faced (Louise)
4 The Real Slim Shady (Eminem)
5 Jumpin' Jumpin' (Destiny's Child)



Shadowfax

FEAR THE BLACK RIDERS

» RETROREVIVAL



» VIC-20 » 1982 » POSTERN LTD

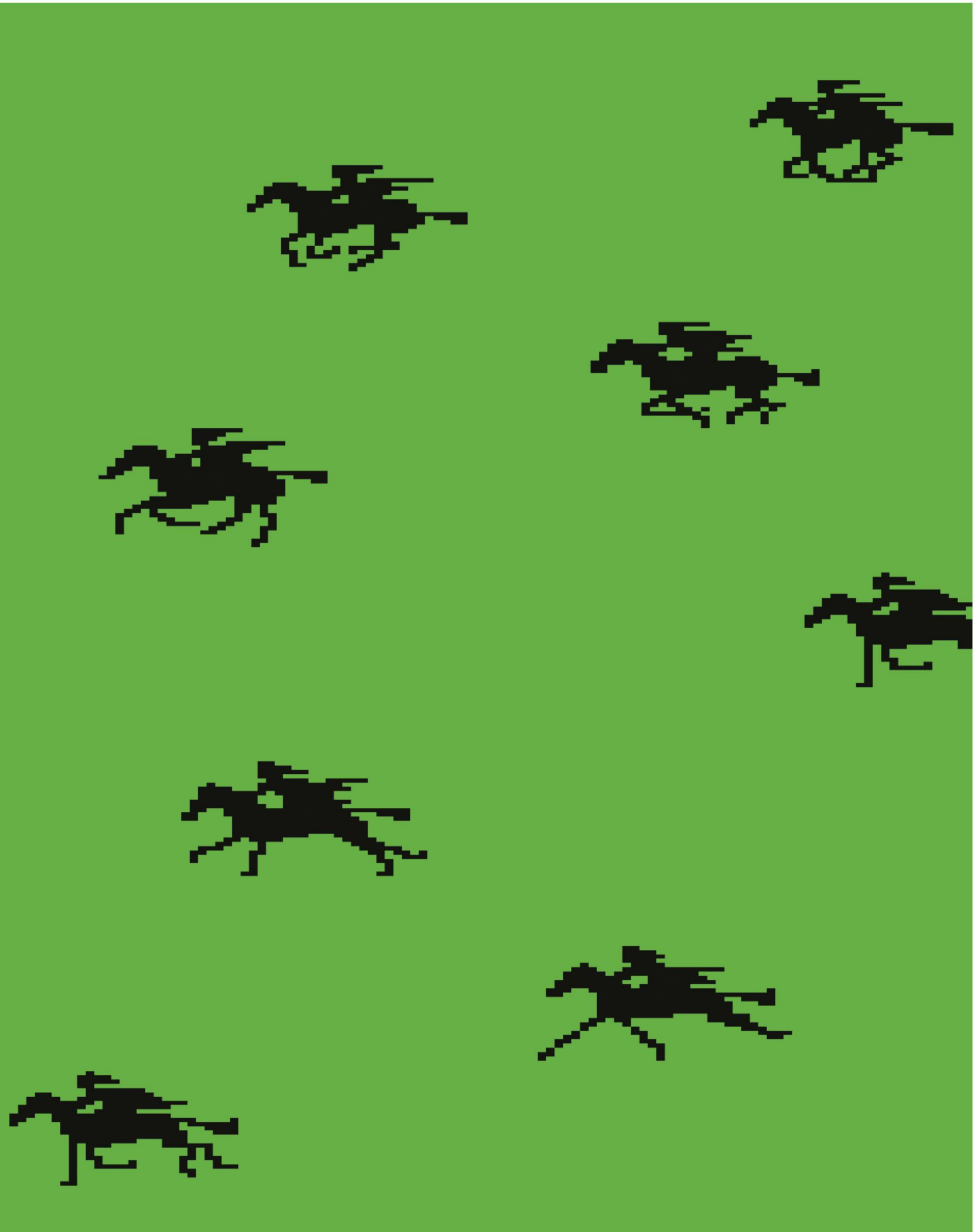
The man smiled down through his ginger beard to the expectant 12 year-olds below. "I've got something in my pocket that's going to blow your mind," he announced. He pulled out a jet-black cassette, slipped it into the tape deck of the computer shop's VIC-20 display model and pressed play. We waited, the shop silent but for the whirring of the Datasette, wondering just why the man was smiling so confidently.

Suddenly, there was Gandalf on the screen astride his mighty steed, hurling lightning bolts at an endless stream of deadly ring wraiths galloping towards their mortal enemy. And how they galloped. The hooves clattering down on Middle Earth, the black riders hunched over their mounts, the wind billowing the White Wizard's flowing locks… to a bunch of schoolboys raised on Tolkien, it looked, no, it *felt*, so real.

I've never forgotten the moment I first saw *Shadowfax* in the appropriately named First Bytes computer store in Derby back in 1982. A VIC-20 went straight on my Christmas list and so began my enduring love affair with all things Commodore.

The game was one of a quartet produced for the VIC by Mike Singleton, who would go on to find fame with his seminal *Lords Of Midnight* series, and included the addictive *Snake Pit* and the wildly ambitious *3-Deep Space*, which came with its own 3D glasses. It was *Shadowfax* which really captured the imagination, though, and not just because of the beautiful, Muybridge-inspired animation of the horses. Shooting down the hordes of Nazgul required you to launch and then detonate your lightning bolts precisely when they were upon your foes, a stern challenge as the speed and number of the riders increased. I distinctly recall my high score of 147, the number sticking in my mind for its snooker connotations and sense of monumental achievement.

And yes, I'm well aware that, in hindsight, we should have been a lot more cautious about a mysterious grown man boasting to kids about what he had in his pocket… *



THE KINGS OF DONKEY



HIGH SCORE HEROES

WES COPELAND

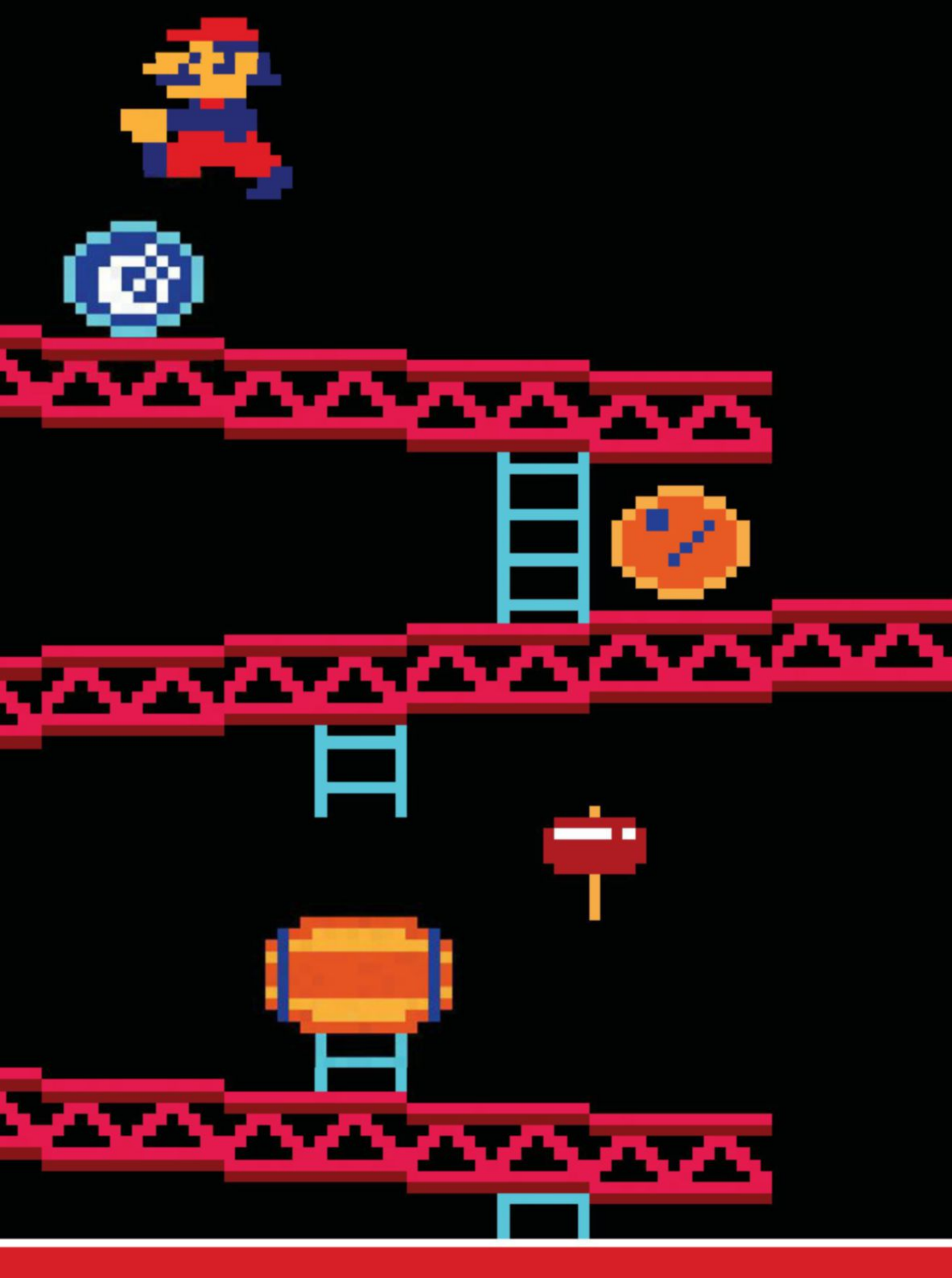
ROBBIE LAKEMAN

STEVE WIEBE

BILLY MITCHELL

KONG





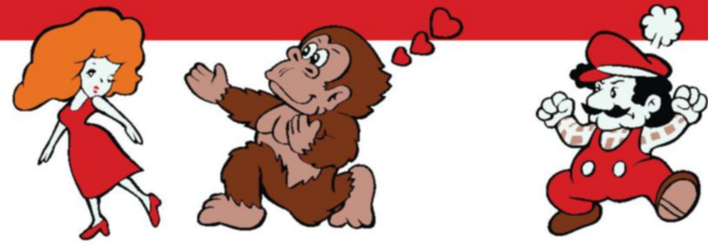
Ten years after the release of the film The King Of Kong, the battle for the high score on Donkey Kong is as intense as ever. Paul Drury talks monkey business with the key players

Billy Mitchell leans towards us and stares directly into our eyes. "You're saying somebody stole my thunder? Listen, I got a *Donkey Kong* kill screen in 1982 and no one did that again until the turn of the century. It was that achievement that began this whole hoopla. It was why the film was made and it led to the revival of competitive videogame playing… do you think anybody sits on top of *Donkey Kong* more than me?"

Whoops. Maybe it was a mistake to ask the most recognisable man in classic arcade gaming how it felt to no longer be the King Of Kong. He has a point, though. Once known as the first player to score the 'perfect game' on *Pac-Man* (an achievement not without controversy but that's another story), Billy Mitchell became synonymous with Nintendo's 1981 arcade hit due to his memorable turn as the 'villain' of the piece in the film *The King Of Kong*. Released in 2007, it portrayed Billy as a kind of evil overlord, directing goons to do his dirty work and crushing the plucky underdog Steve Wiebe, pretender to his crown, under the weight of his huge ego. We wondered just when Billy realised he was being cast as Darth Vader to Steve's Luke?

"They smoked that past me," he replies in classic Yankee fashion. "A friend told me what they had done [in the film] because, and I know people will want me to take a polygraph test before they believe this, I don't watch the films I'm in. The experience of making ▶

DONKEY KONG



» The new kings with the old (l-r) Robbie Lakeman, Billy Mitchell and Wes Copeland



© Bill McEvoy



© Bill McEvoy

it was tremendous, though. I don't have a problem playing the bad guy. I think I'm pretty good at it."

So was it all an act? We are talking to Billy at the Florida Freeplay pinball and videogame show and he undeniably has an onstage persona. Dressed in a tuxedo as immaculate as his hair, he is all swaggering bravado, posing for photos with his trademark raised thumb and lapping up the attention. Offstage, he is thoughtful, witty and even quite humble, a family man who talks fondly of the friends he has made through videogames far more than the fame it has brought him. Given the negativity that followed his appearance in the film, does he wish he had never got involved?

"During the filming, a lot of people I know turned to me as the one with wisdom and experience and asked, 'Hey, are these film-making guys okay?' and I said they were," he sighs. "That's why I feel an ass. I didn't feel anything bad would happen. When it came out, I phoned all the people that had been made to look stupid in the film, who had been called 'my minions', to apologise to them. That was a hard thing to do."

One of those supposed minions was Billy's old friend Steve Sanders. Steve appeared alongside Billy in the famous *Life* magazine photo taken outside the Twin Galaxies arcade in November 1982, featuring 16 high scoring champions next to their arcade machine of choice. Steve, author of *The Video Masters Guide To Donkey Kong*, is pictured leaning proudly over a *Donkey Kong* cabinet, thanks

"I don't have a problem playing the bad guy. I think I'm good at it"
Billy Mitchell

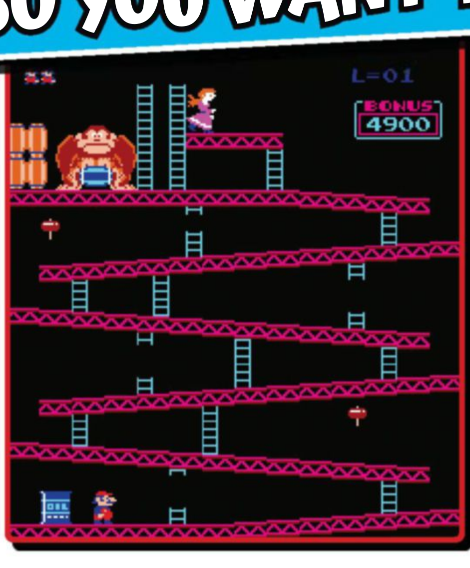
to his record score of 3,165,300. Hang on, that's almost three times higher than the current top score. Steve, are you the real King Of Kong?

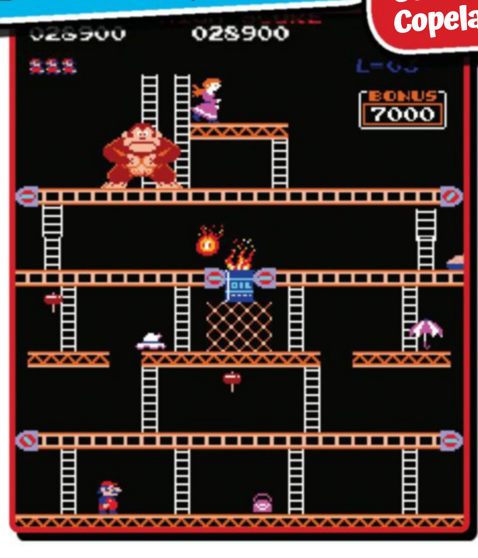
"No, I lied and cheated my way to fame," admits Steve with a resigned grin. "I desired the reputation of being the world's best gamer so much that I sacrificed my integrity to keep up appearances. I lied about my high score and it's one of the greatest regrets of my life. Billy should have been on that *Kong* machine, not me. The fact that he forgave me when I admitted it and became one of my best friends is testament to his character. The result was life changing. I never wanted anyone to perceive me as a liar ever again."

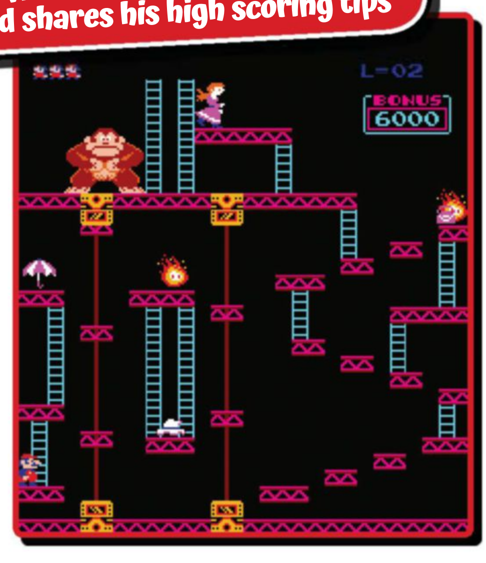
Being truthful is something Steve, a practising attorney at law, holds dear. He argues vehemently against the demonisation of Billy in the movie, pointing out how through judicious editing, wilful omission of key facts and a laissez-faire attitude to the actual sequence of events, the filmmakers twisted the narrative to cast him as the bad guy. "Take the part where Billy supposedly sends a 'squad' to Steve Wiebe's house

SO YOU WANT TO BE KING?

Current World Record holder Wes Copeland shares his high scoring tips







BARRELS

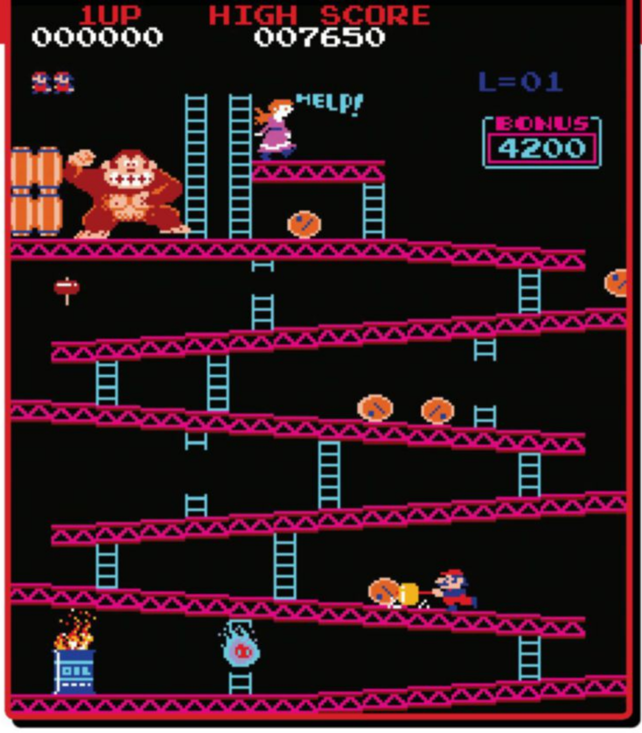
■ Don't go for the bottom hammer unless you're a very experienced player. The longer you stay on the screen, the more dangerous the barrel groupings get that you'll have to overcome. Rush to the top, grab the top hammer, and move on. Also, remember that it's possible to control many of the barrels on the screen with your inputs. They're more likely to go down ladders that you're walking towards.

PIES

■ When the screen starts, it's best not to move until all the fireballs jump out of the oil can. You want them to jump out of the left, that way you have a chance to easily clear the screen on the right while they're out of the way. If the fireballs don't let you clear on the right, hang out on the bottom of the screen until they all go away. Once they're on the top with Donkey Kong, they can't come back down.

SPRINGS

■ Learn to recognise the length of the springs. You can see this by watching where they bounce in relation to where Donkey Kong is standing. Notice they don't all bounce in the same spot. Some springs are long, others are short. The long springs (the ones that have their initial landing in between Donkey Kong's feet) are the springs that are deadly. Short springs are the ones that are safe to make a run for the ladder on!



to inspect his machine," he protests. "Bill never sent anyone and it was Steve's own mother who invited the gentlemen into the garage to play *Donkey Kong* while they waited for Steve to come home!"

Steve continues to point out many similar distortions and inaccuracies, from the fairly basic fact that one Tim Sczerby was the record holder rather than Billy Mitchell when Steve Wiebe started submitting his scores to Twin Galaxies for recognition, to juxtaposing shots that seem to show Bill ignoring his rival when in fact they had been chatting and joking together moments before. Given his current profession, has Steve ever considered prosecuting the offending filmmakers? "I still think it's one of the best documentaries ever made and I absolutely love it," laughs Steve Sanders. "Seth Gordon and Ed Cunningham [director and producer of *The King Of Kong* respectively] are master storytellers. They ▶

» [Arcade] Smashing barrels is an easy method to build your score up.



RIVETS

■ Always use the 'Star Pattern' to clear the board. The Star Pattern is a particular order for clearing out the first four rivets on the left. Get the lower one first, then work from the top. On the last remaining left rivet, you should be able to grab the hammer and run across. When you smash fireballs, they'll then respawn on the left and be trapped or zoned out so as to no longer be any threat.

Q&A: STEVE WEIBE

The hero of The King of Kong looks back at the film and the continued obsession with Donkey Kong

How did you come to star in *The King of Kong*?

I met Ed Cunningham [the producer] in 2005 and he expressed an interest in my story. Back then, I was at a standstill with Twin Galaxies regarding my million score. I knew that my interactions with Roy Shildt were the reason I was under fire, but I felt I deserved a chance to prove myself. If the story could be told on film, then there was a chance of getting my scores recognised. It gave me a glimmer of hope.



» Like many *Donkey Kong* masters, Steve Wiebe is a dab hand at *Donkey Kong Junior*, too.

Did you realise you were being cast as the hero and Billy Mitchell as the villain?

It wasn't until I first saw the film that I realised the film crew's perspective of Billy and me. Having lived through it all, it was strange seeing the story unfold on film. I felt the film crew did a good job of telling what was a very convoluted story in a concise way that people could relate to and care about. I realised that there was editing necessary to make the film fit the structure needed for the big screen but I didn't have a problem with that. I knew Billy would not be too happy, though.

Do you think the portrayal of him in the film was unfair?

I think both sides of the story were dramatised to some extent for entertainment value, so you could view that as unfair if you're trying to assess our true characters. I always took Billy's comments as tongue in cheek and thought he had a good sense of humour. I never thought of him as my enemy, I just felt there was some unbreakable wall that separated him from me because of the whole Roy Shildt factor. Today, we are very cordial and shake hands at events. We'll say a few words, but I haven't had a lengthy conversation with him about anything. Maybe one day we can sit back and talk about the movie and laugh.

Were you surprised at how well received the film was?

I first saw it at the True/False film festival. I remember the person in front of me playing air guitar to *You're The Best* and I thought it was cool how the audience was enjoying it. That was a fun summer, making the rounds to various theatres in several cities to see the film and do Q&A sessions.

You became quite the celebrity!

It was definitely a fun period of my life and looking back, it seems very strange that it happened to me. At the LA screening, I met Vince Vaughn and Tony Hawk. I also appeared on The *Late Late Show* with Craig Ferguson during that trip and met Sylvester Stallone there. I remember playing *Donkey Kong* at E3, going for the record in front of a cheering crowd, which was really cool. It seemed for a couple of years, there was always some invitation coming through for me to appear somewhere.

Your wife also appears in the film. How does she look back on that period of your lives?

My wife was patient during the whole time I was going for the record. There were times when she would be frustrated with my devotion to the game, but she got to experience things after the film that were fun. One of the highlights was going to the premiere of *Four Christmases* in LA because I had a cameo in the movie.

You continued to play *Donkey Kong* competitively for many years and almost won the first Kong Off. Could you ever reclaim the record?

With the current high score being so high, it's hard to imagine the record changing hands very frequently or at all going forward. If I rededicated my life to the game, I might be able to get that one-in-a-million game to break the record, but the cost is too high for me. I'm content with what I've accomplished, so I don't see myself making any run at the record. I love the fact that the film propelled the game into the limelight and even after so many years, new discoveries are being made on how to point press and push the limits of the game. It's pretty fascinating that a simple, old game still has some buried treasures to be found.

And finally, who do you think is the true King of Kong?

Not to discount all of the great *Donkey Kong* players today, but I would say Billy is the King because he mastered the game during the height of its popularity. I wish I could have played at that level back in 1981. It took me until 1990 to reach a kill screen, so I definitely admire Billy for his high scores back in the Golden Age of videogames.



THE KONG OFF

Richey Knucklez, founder of the Kong Off competitive event, tells us how it started

What inspired you to organise the first Kong Off tournament?
There was this one guy in *The King Of Kong* movie, a friend of Steve Wiebe, who says, 'I would pay money to see Billy Mitchell play live against Steve.' It was like he was daring somebody to do it. So I made lots of calls and got the 12 best *Donkey Kong* players together… and we all had a really good time!

What are your abiding memories of that first event in 2011?
It's one of the reasons why I got divorced. I put six months of my life into organising that first tournament, getting a dozen machines restored and looking brand new, and it was just me. It was very stressful but I have great memories of that event and it was so dramatic. Steve Wiebe had to leave slightly early to catch his plane home and on his very last game, he took the lead! I put him on my shoulders and carried him around the arcade and he was high fiving everyone. And man, he was not light. It was before he lost a lot of weight and he was chunky. It wasn't easy, I tell ya!

So Steve won the first Kong Off?
No, he was at the airport when we had to phone him and say Hank Chien had beaten his score!

Why do you think players are still battling to be the best at *Donkey Kong*?
It's all from that stupid movie! The film makers completely wrote Tim Sczerby, the guy who had actually beaten Billy's record, out of the story. They had to go with Billy because he knew how to play the villain. It's all acting. And they made Steve Wiebe into a whiny, cry baby which he really isn't in real life. It was naughty, but it gave them the perfect formula for the movie.

For more on Richie, see the movie *The King of Arcades*, listen to his band Knuckle Sandwich or visit his arcade in Flemington, New Jersey, USA.

© Bill McEvoy



» Richie Knucklez plays side saddle at the Kong Off 4.

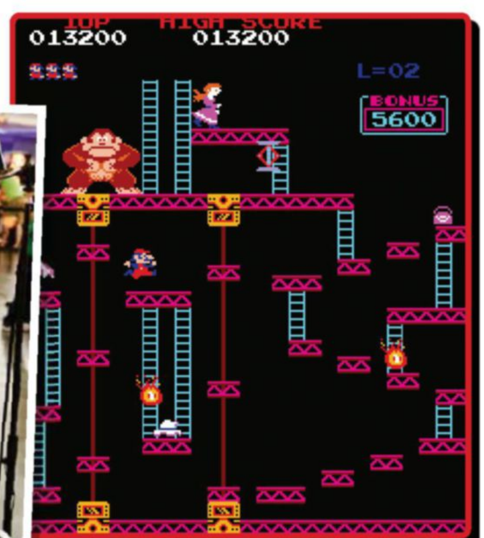
> **" You need the skill to capitalise on the good luck"**
> Wes Copeland

made obscure subjects and subject matter into a film everyone could watch and enjoy. They just didn't tell the story that Billy, and others, hoped they would."

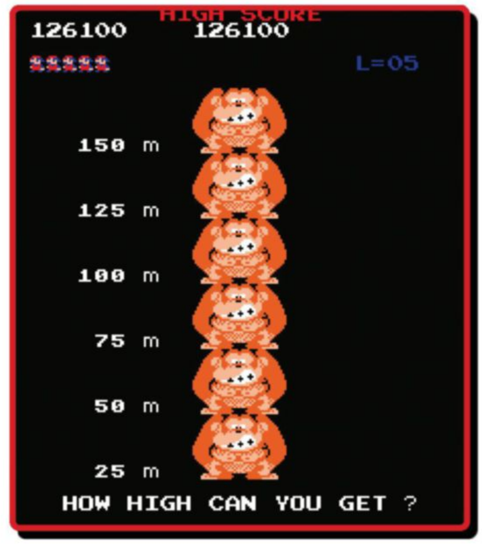
As well as making the tale of two grown men battling for bragging rights on a 26-year-old videogame accessible and entertaining to a mainstream audience, they also ignited the interest of the classic gaming community. Whilst anyone with even a passing knowledge of old arcade games knew *Donkey Kong*, before the release of the film it was not generally seen as a 'tournament' game. The huge success of *The King Of Kong* changed all that. Events like the Kong Off (see boxout) encourage head to head competition, sites like Twitch allow players to stream their games and a whole community of avid gamers have coalesced around donkeykongforum.com which conscientiously tracks the scores of the 300 best players. Steve Wiebe and Billy Mitchell, the old kings, just scrape into the top 20. The ten best scores have all been achieved in the last five years and the world record has changed hands numerous times since 2010, with Wes Copeland currently sitting in the number one spot thanks to spending just over three-and-a-quarter hours in May 2016 amassing an incredible 1,218,000 points.

"A record-breaking game takes a combination of both skill and luck," smiles Wes. "You need the skill to capitalise on the good luck, so you're looking for that lucky game. I would say for every 20 games of *Donkey Kong*, only one has the potential to [set a record] just based on the randomness in the game."

There are two key things you need to know about Wes. First, his skills are mesmerising. Just visit twitch.tv/wescopeland if you need any convincing of his mastery of the game. Second, he is 26 years old. Yes, he wasn't even born when *Donkey Kong* first entered the arcade. If his quest to be the best isn't due to nostalgia or rekindling a childhood passion for the game,



» [Arcade] Be careful not to fall too far; Jumpman's knees aren't very strong and too high a tumble will lose you a life.



» [Arcade] It's a tough task getting to 150m, let alone racking up a score that will make Water Day blush.

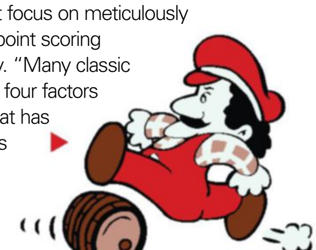
we assume it must be down to seeing *The King Of Kong* and deciding, 'I want that crown'.

"I think it's a common misconception that the film is the reason why people are interested in competing on *Donkey Kong*," Wes corrects us. "There are films about other classic titles and they receive little to no attention. What attracted me to the game was the fact that, by accident, it's perfectly built for competition."

This is something we had not considered. Surely any game that records a high score is ideal for competitive play?

Wes outlines the factors which make *Donkey Kong* so well suited. "First, it's easy for anyone to understand. It's watchable even if you're not a player. Second, due to the heavy amount of randomness in the game, there are no all-purpose patterns that work 100 per cent of the time. No two barrel boards will ever be the same. Sure, there are 'patterns' we use on the rivets screen, but they only work about 60 per cent of the time at best. As a result, the game forces you to be inventive, creative and strongly leverages your problem-solving skills. Third, the game length is just enough to drive you to borderline insanity but not push you over the edge. A 'safe' kill screen game takes an hour and a half and a world record game takes about three and a half hours. And fourth, there's the kill screen itself."

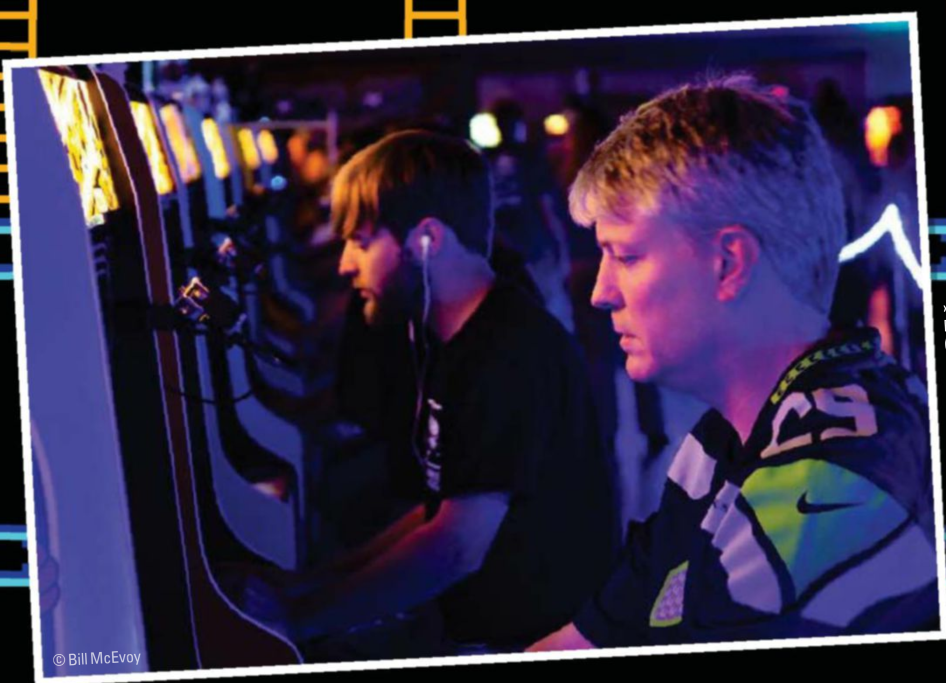
Ah yes, the infamous kill screen. A bug in the code means on level 22, after 116 screens of leaping and ladder scaling, Mario (or Jumpman as he is named in the game) unexpectedly keels over and dies after just a handful of seconds. Even the most skilled player could never complete the board in the minimal time given so it effectively provides a distinct 'end' to the game. That's important because it means, unlike many classic titles, it cannot theoretically be played forever. Games like *Q*Bert*, *Asteroids* and *Nibbler*, which give players extra lives at regular intervals, can be 'marathoned', with single games often lasting several days, and achieving the high score becomes as much a test of endurance as skill. With *Donkey Kong*, the predetermined end point means players must focus on meticulously exploiting every possible point scoring opportunity along the way. "Many classic games have one of these four factors but it's a truly rare gem that has them all," notes Wes. "It's



WALTER'S WISE WORDS

The high score referee gives his take on the documentary

"*The King Of Kong* is unquestionably a work of art that will be revered by people for a very long time," declares Walter Day, founder of Twin Galaxies and one of the stars of *The King Of Kong* film. "It is now widely known, however, that it was an intentionally designed work of fiction that strived to create an endearing hero and an unforgettable villain. The film throws aside the facts and makes a spectacle that entertains even non-gamers. Everyone in the film felt hurt and betrayed but it has become both a learning experience as well as vehicle for personal growth… learning forgiveness, overcoming obstacles and not taking one's self too seriously. Everybody needs to star someday in their own *King Of Kong*-type debacle and benefit from the much-needed humility that it serves up."

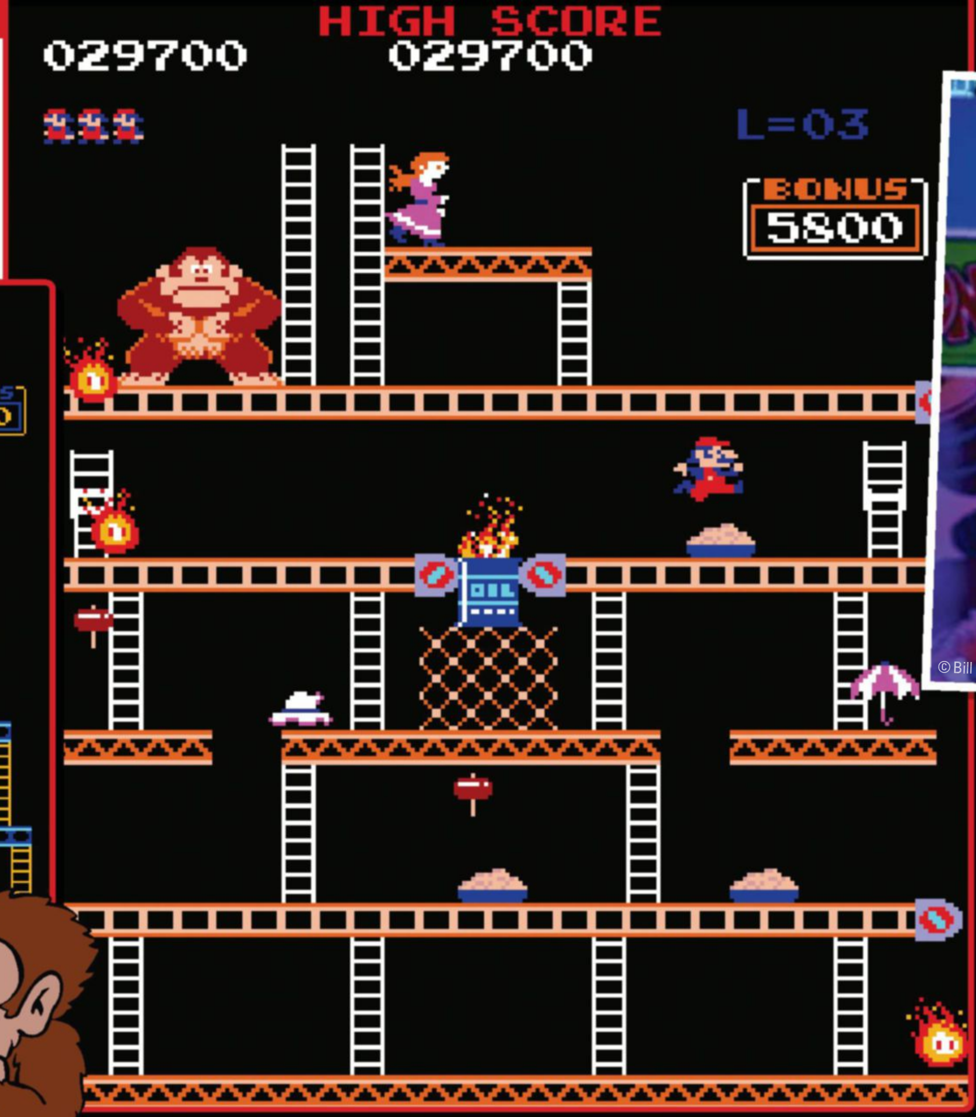


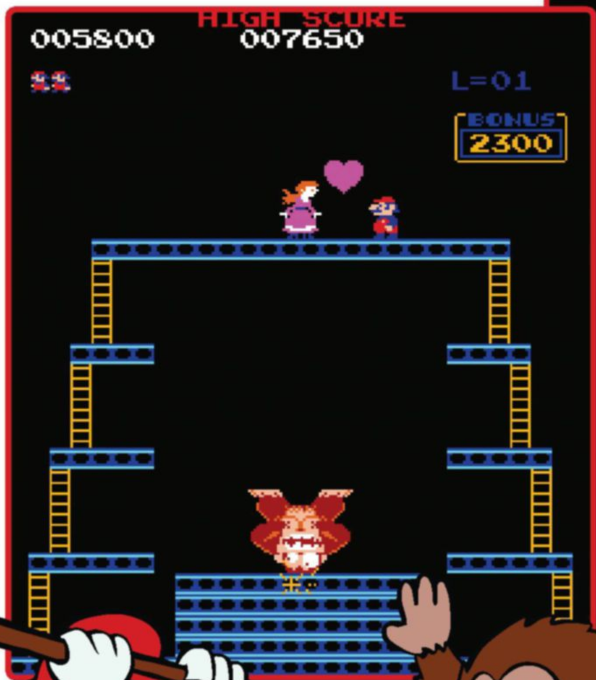
© Bill McEvoy

» 'New' boy Robbie Lakeman (left) battles Steve Wiebe (right) at ReplayFX, July 2016.

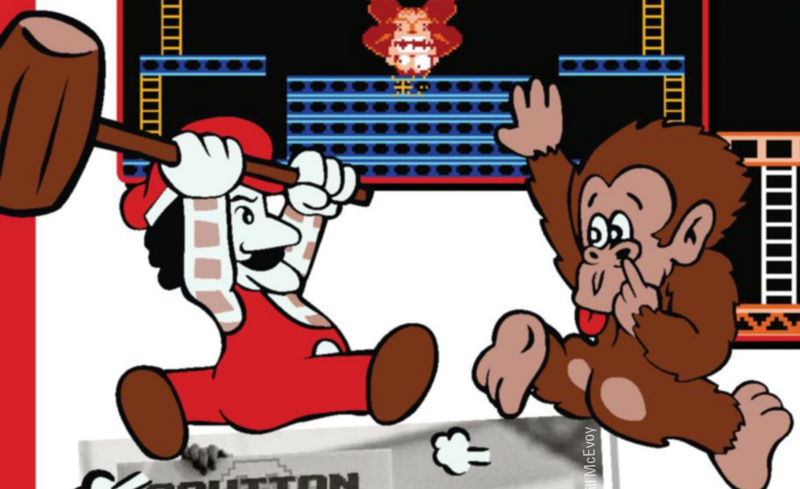
DONKEY KONG

» [Arcade] Jumpman's taking a leap of faith in the 'Pie Factory'; which way will the conveyer belt shift the hazzard?






© Bill McEvoy





© Bill McEvoy

» Robbie Lakeman after his triumph at Kong Off 5.

why *Donkey Kong* is perfect for competitive gaming and I'm a very competitive person."

Of course, you cannot have competition without competitors and Wes' record-breaking score was undoubtedly a product of his rivalry with previous champion and victor of the last Kong Off, Robbie Lakeman. "When Wes started competing against me it made me even more motivated to play," reveals Robbie, who at 30 years old is another of the new generation of contenders who didn't grow up with the game. "It sped up my progress as a player. I hope I can take the record back one day. With the right amount of luck, my highest score would be around 1.25 million but I don't want it to consume all my time. I became obsessed with wanting to be the best at it. It can become an unhealthy obsession when it starts to feel like a second job."

"I've bloody smashed the cabinet with my bare hands"

Allen Staal

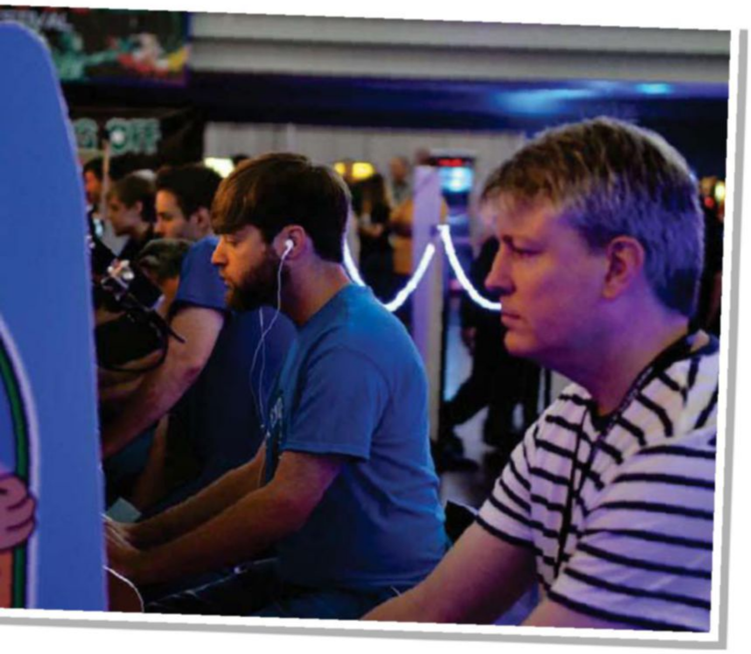
To be the best at any hotly contested game requires the kind of single-minded dedication and endless practice which most psychologists would deem 'obsessive' but we have noticed something else whilst watching videos of the top players showboating their skills at live events. They actually get emotional. There are head slaps, fist pumps, whoops and the occasional profanity. Compare that to the grim determination on the face of an expert *Pac-Man* player, silently striving for the perfect game. *Donkey Kong* seems to really inflame passion in its players and none more so than Australian Allen Staal.

I've bloody smashed the cabinet with my bare hands," confesses Allen, who has reached the kill screen on half a dozen occasions but is yet to crack the magic million mark. "I've broken my knuckles a couple of times and cracked a wrist. I've often said I'll take an axe to the bloody thing but I don't because it took me so long to build the cabinet in the first place! Yeah mate, *Donkey Kong* is an obsession."

Allen is what is diplomatically known as a 'character'. His outbursts while streaming his play online have become legendary, featuring industrial levels of swearing, full frontal cabinet abuse and singalong rants directed at his rival, Brian Allen, who he carefully explains is a "fucking idiot". You will find no less than five 'rage' compilations of Brian's hugely entertaining antics on YouTube. "Number 4 is my favourite," quips Brian. "It's definitely not healthy me swearing and carrying on the way I do. It's just I want that high score, mate, and I get so frustrated when I can't. The Americans that tune in seem to love it for some reason. I was a nobody here in Australia but now I've travelled to America to the Kong Off and have friends all over the world."

Allen is a well-known figure in the *Donkey Kong* scene and clearly enjoys being part of the worldwide community which has grown up around the game yet even he notes that some of the rivalries are far from friendly. Back-biting, bitterness and allegations of foul play have sadly become as common as the camaraderie of players sharing tips and tricks and enjoying seeing the score pushed ever higher.

"It's a members club, a social clique, and I think they've inadvertently alienated more people than they've retained," states Cat DeSpira, a videogame writer, avid arcade collector and outspoken critic of the male-dominated tribalism she sees as blighting the classic gaming community. "The attention *Donkey Kong* has received over the last ten years didn't happen organically. It was a direct result of commercial marketing via the two main characters in the film, Walter Day and Billy Mitchell, and they've used the recognition they've received from *The King Of Kong* to reinvent their historical accomplishments [to imply] they had more influence on classic gaming than they ever



» Robbie Lakeman playing side by side with Steve Weibe.

really had. I see that arrogant ass Mitchell at Kong Off events, sauntering around the room like an old, worn out tune, barely able to play the game at the level he's acting he can or ever did, knowing no matter who wins, he will still maintain the rhetoric that he's 'The King of Kong' and Day will eternally back him up."

Cat is in no doubt who isn't the King but that leaves the question of who exactly is? In one sense, the answer is obvious. Right now, it's Wes Copeland. He has the highest score ever recorded but it could be beaten by Robbie Lakeman or any skilled contender tomorrow. Indeed, someone inspired by this article to study the videos online, learn the secrets of maximising their score and put in the many hundreds of hours of practice required could become the new champion.

The more interesting question is why is Kong still King? Of all the games from the Golden Era of the arcade, why does *Donkey Kong* remain such a draw to players old and new? We think it's a combination of factors. The film undoubtedly brought it to the attention of an audience far beyond the retro gaming crowd and the movie title unequivocally posed a seductive challenge to a whole new generation of players. It also inextricably linked the eternally photogenic Billy Mitchell with the game, meaning every public appearance, interview or media mention of the most famous man in classic gaming inevitably leads to talk of *Kong*.

Then there are the mechanics of the game itself, which lend themselves so well to score chasing. The competitive gaming scene that has sprung up around events such as the Kong Off keeps the interest high as does the fact that the crown keeps changing hands, with new challengers emerging to challenge the old guard. The community which has developed around is crucial here, too, particularly in the early days when videos posted by experts such as MAME master Brian Saglio showed how the score could be pushed into the stratosphere. And there's the 'Mario' factor: gamers will always want to know where the most iconic videogame character in history had his first jump.

One other thing. It's just a bloody good game – easy to learn but difficult to master, as all the best games are. So put in a credit, hit start and see what your answer is to that enduring question: How High Can You Get? *

Thanks to all the Kings and Queens of Kong who contributed to this article.

SCREEN PLAY

Five more great films about classic videogames

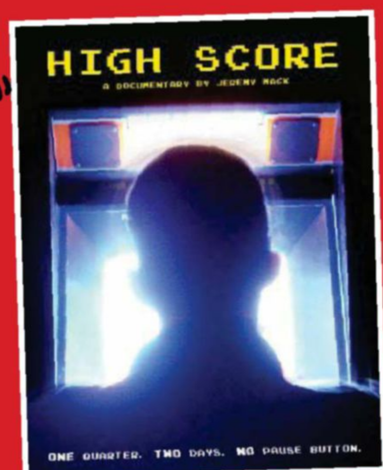


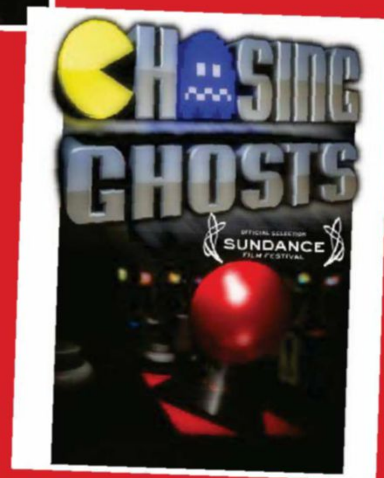
◀ INTO THE VALLEY OF THE SPACE INVADERS 1982

■ A fascinating look at life at Atari during its Golden Era, this short documentary features great footage of classic games and their creators. And did you know the *Tempest* controller should actually be called a 'whirligig'? Us neither.

▼ HIGH SCORE 2006

■ Focusing on Bill Carlton's attempt to break the long-standing *Missile Command* marathon record, a feat which requires playing a single game continuously for over two days, this is a profoundly human story of hope, despair and roller disco.





▲ CHASING GHOSTS 2007

■ Taking the famous *Life* magazine photo of top arcade players from 1982 as a starting point, this documentary traces the stories of those fresh-faced champs as they prepare for a reunion with old friends and rivals. Entertaining and touching in equal measure.

▼ MAN VS SNAKE 2015

■ *Nibbler* holds a special place in high scoring history. Tim McVey was the first person to record a billion point game back in 1984 and this highly personal film follows his quest to regain the crown and the many shenanigans along the way.





▲ THE LOST ARCADE 2015

■ An unashamedly nostalgic look at how arcades shaped lives and forged friendships, centring on Chinatown Fair in New York City. If you misspent your youth feeding coins into cabs, this will bring a smile to your face, a tear to your eye and a twitch to your fingers.

» PUSHING THE LIMITS

R-Type

How Bob Pape went from considering the conversion impossible to delivering something incredible

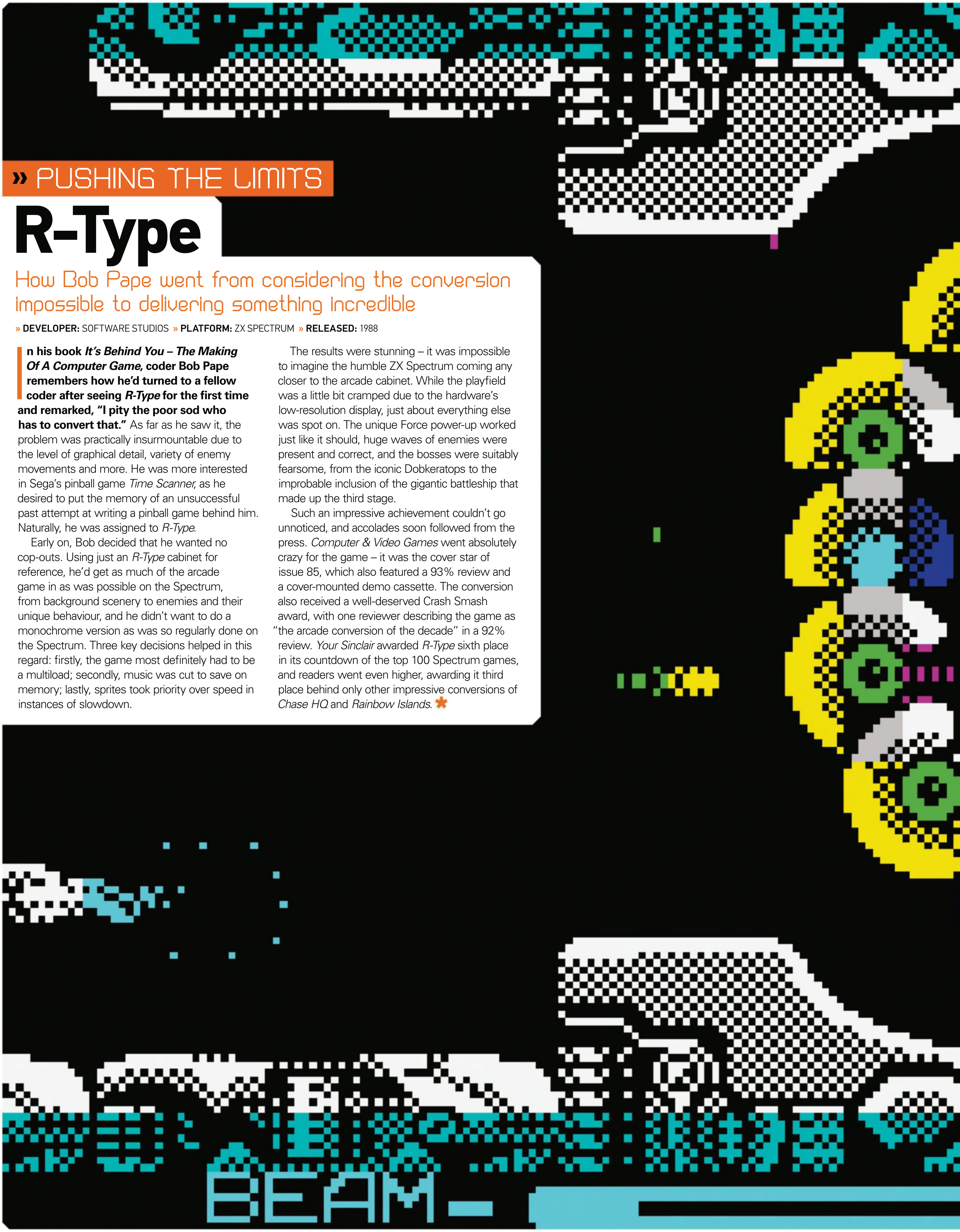
» **DEVELOPER:** SOFTWARE STUDIOS » **PLATFORM:** ZX SPECTRUM » **RELEASED:** 1988

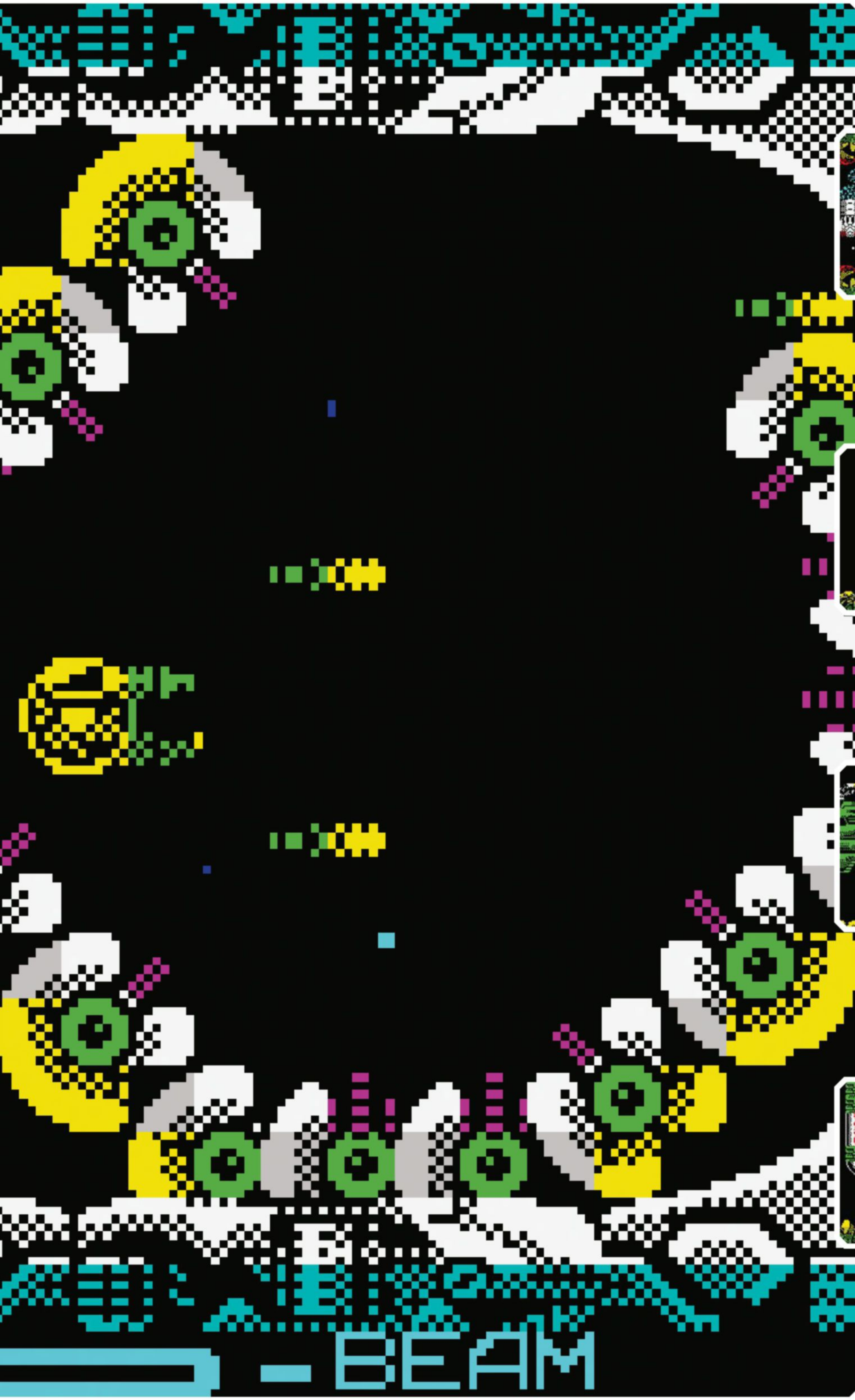
In his book *It's Behind You – The Making Of A Computer Game*, coder Bob Pape remembers how he'd turned to a fellow coder after seeing *R-Type* for the first time and remarked, "I pity the poor sod who has to convert that." As far as he saw it, the problem was practically insurmountable due to the level of graphical detail, variety of enemy movements and more. He was more interested in Sega's pinball game *Time Scanner*, as he desired to put the memory of an unsuccessful past attempt at writing a pinball game behind him. Naturally, he was assigned to *R-Type*.

Early on, Bob decided that he wanted no cop-outs. Using just an *R-Type* cabinet for reference, he'd get as much of the arcade game in as was possible on the Spectrum, from background scenery to enemies and their unique behaviour, and he didn't want to do a monochrome version as was so regularly done on the Spectrum. Three key decisions helped in this regard: firstly, the game most definitely had to be a multiload; secondly, music was cut to save on memory; lastly, sprites took priority over speed in instances of slowdown.

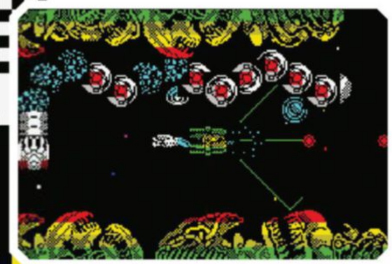
The results were stunning – it was impossible to imagine the humble ZX Spectrum coming any closer to the arcade cabinet. While the playfield was a little bit cramped due to the hardware's low-resolution display, just about everything else was spot on. The unique Force power-up worked just like it should, huge waves of enemies were present and correct, and the bosses were suitably fearsome, from the iconic Dobkeratops to the improbable inclusion of the gigantic battleship that made up the third stage.

Such an impressive achievement couldn't go unnoticed, and accolades soon followed from the press. *Computer & Video Games* went absolutely crazy for the game – it was the cover star of issue 85, which also featured a 93% review and a cover-mounted demo cassette. The conversion also received a well-deserved Crash Smash award, with one reviewer describing the game as "the arcade conversion of the decade" in a 92% review. *Your Sinclair* awarded *R-Type* sixth place in its countdown of the top 100 Spectrum games, and readers went even higher, awarding it third place behind only other impressive conversions of *Chase HQ* and *Rainbow Islands*. *





HOW IT PUSHED THE LIMITS. . .



Sprite Overload

Faced with the choice of maintaining program speed or sacrificing elements of the arcade game, Bob Pape chose to keep it authentic. The result is a bit of slowdown, but it was tolerable and extra authenticity mattered more.



Graphical Compression

Balancing speed and data savings, the sprite compression routine in *R-Type* used a bit flag to represent empty bytes which had been discarded. It didn't save as much data as other methods, but decompression was very quick.



The Mega Ship

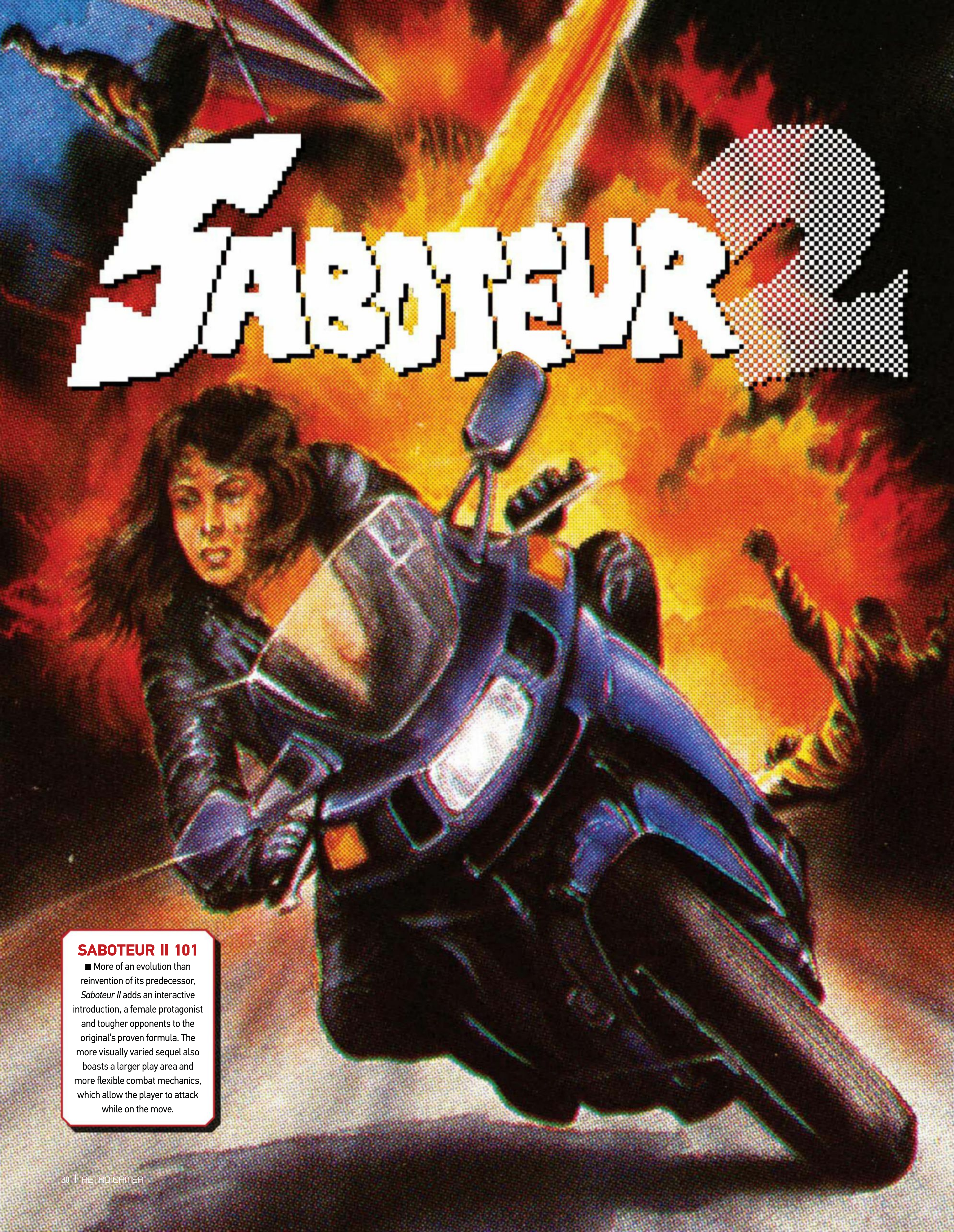
The gigantic battleship in the third level is represented as a gigantic background, with sprites floating over it to represent gun emplacements. When destroyed, the sprites disappear to reveal prewrecked parts of the ship.



Clever Colour

Mark A Jones adapted his Atari ST graphics to provide visuals for the Spectrum version, and preserved a great deal of detail. Use of single-pixel buffers in background graphics minimised potential colour clash problems, too.

SABOTEUR 2



SABOTEUR II 101

■ More of an evolution than reinvention of its predecessor, *Saboteur II* adds an interactive introduction, a female protagonist and tougher opponents to the original's proven formula. The more visually varied sequel also boasts a larger play area and more flexible combat mechanics, which allow the player to attack while on the move.

Durell Software didn't do sequels, but the publisher made an exception for Clive Townsend's stealth platformer Saboteur. Clive tells Rory Milne how an unexpected TV interview led to Saboteur II



The games industry of the Eighties is fondly remembered for its originality, but the decade also played host to a number of accomplished sequels. Typically, these follow-ups would be trailed in the news sections of the computer press, but the announcement of developer Clive Townsend's second *Saboteur* title was anything but typical. "After *Saboteur* was released, I was woken early one morning and dragged to the office," Clive begins. "It turned out that there was a BBC news crew there, and I was thrown into an unexpected and unrehearsed interview. The last question was: 'What's next?' So I ad-libbed about sending the ninja back out on a second mission with a different scenario. I hadn't actually discussed it with the boss – it just seemed the natural thing to do."

Thankfully, Durell Software owner Robert White approved his designer's plan, despite having never commissioned a follow-up before. "Rob thought it would be commercially viable, and a quick project because it used a similar engine to *Saboteur*. It's strange that it was the only Durell game to get a sequel, but that may be because it was story-based. Maybe the other programmers at Durell wanted a new technical challenge and I wanted to tell a new story. Either way, it gave me the opportunity to add more to the *Saboteur* world."

Given *Saboteur*'s popularity, pressure from Robert to deliver an equally strong sequel would have been understandable, but Clive remembers being motivated by his own expectations. "Durell was more creative than pressured, there weren't really deadlines for projects. The main pressure was to try to cram more into this game than the last. I wanted it to be similar in style to *Saboteur* but increase the number of animation frames, explain more of the story, make the missions more complex and make the map much bigger. This was definitely a problem with limited memory."

But despite designing *Saboteur II* to outclass its predecessor, *Saboteur* was still the biggest – although not the only – influence on Clive's sequel. "I did play other games, but there wasn't really anything like *Saboteur*, so I pretty much had free reign. There were fighting games and platformers, and games with large sprites, but nobody had really combined them all. I played *Bruce Lee* on the Speccy and C64 a *lot*, though!"

However, when it came to devising the narrative at the heart of *Saboteur II*, Clive took inspiration from a few of his favourite movies. "I'm sure there were hundreds of small influences from *Bond* and other action films, and the general themes of ninja films that were popular at the time. But the original idea for the bad guy's stronghold was inspired by Blofeld's secret volcano base in *You Only Live Twice*. As the design progressed, it gradually changed into a huge mesa."

A second alteration to Clive's design followed, after discussions with Robert resulted in *Saboteur II* receiving an alternate protagonist. "Originally, the sequel was going to star the same ninja as the first game. But Rob White and I discussed the possibility of having a female lead – it would be helpful for publicity from his point of view and a chance to expand the storyline for me. After the conversation, I redesigned some small bits of the plot, which didn't change the gameplay much."

Saboteur II's gameplay did significantly change, however, when Clive tweaked his game's introductory scene to allow the player to determine how good a start their mission got off to. "I'd programmed the glider to fly in, but I wasn't sure where the best drop-off point



» [ZX Spectrum] Once assembled, sections of paper tape form a code to redirect a missile.

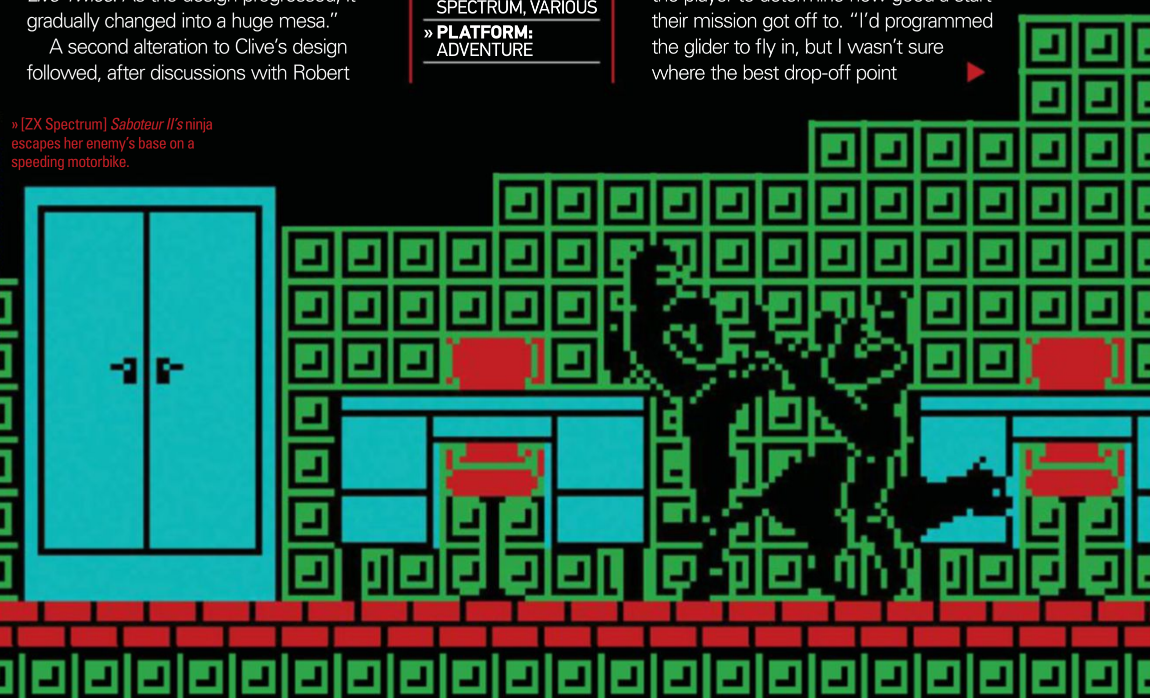


IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** DURELL SOFTWARE
- » **DEVELOPER:** CLIVE TOWNSEND
- » **RELEASED:** 1987
- » **PLATFORM:** SPECTRUM, VARIOUS
- » **PLATFORM:** ADVENTURE



» [ZX Spectrum] *Saboteur II's* ninja escapes her enemy's base on a speeding motorbike.



REMAKING SABOTEUR II

Clive Townsend on his remastered and expanded Saboteur II



How does the *Saboteur II* remake compare to the original game and conversions?

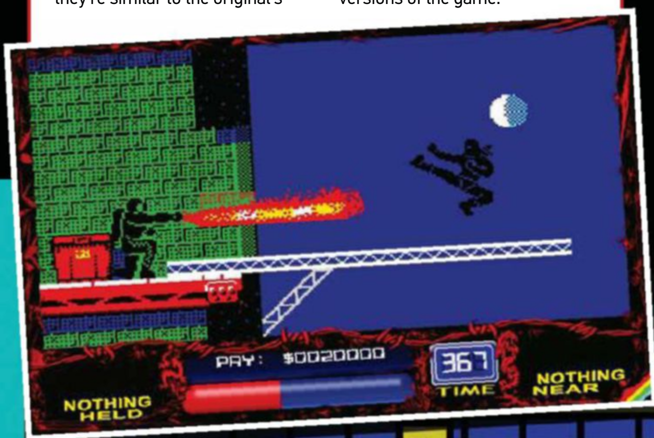
The remake addresses all the issues I mentioned with the original versions. It's much smoother to play and has tons of graphical enhancements – within the limitations of the original machines. Musically, it contains an original tune by Sean Fountain and several remixes of the original classic by Rob Hubbard. The fighting system has been improved, and there is more to discover – especially for budding space cadets.

What sort of enhancements have you made?

The *Saboteur II* remake has a different mission structure to the original. You still have nine unlockable missions, and they're similar to the original's free-roaming exploration, but now they lead you through the plot a bit more thoughtfully. Completing a mission will reveal secret rooms and open doorways, and after mission one you will have access to 'Intel Points,' which reveal extra details about the environment. For 30 years people have been speculating about the evil criminal mastermind and his secret base, and now all their questions will be answered. It also extends the story following the remake of *Saboteur*!

When will it be ready?

I'm putting the final touches on the downloadable and Android versions, and I'm also working on a DOS graphics mode. You can play it at my website, clivetownsend.com. You need to sign up, which costs £2.99, but doing that unlocks all the versions of the game.



would be. After a few tests I realised that the timing of the missions could change dramatically based on where you started, so I decided to let the player pick. And I also made sure that all the levels could be completed in time if you chose wisely."

Further departures from precedents set by *Saboteur* followed, as Clive replaced human and canine opponents with android and feline ones to better suit his storyline. "The choice of androids was a natural progression for the bad guys. It also made for tougher fight sequences, as normal humans were no match for a ninja. The pumas were to just have something different to the dogs in the first game."

Additionally, Clive's ambitions for the scale and fluidity of *Saboteur II* led him to completely rework the combat system he had devised for the original. "As the map grew, I realised that the gameplay of *Saboteur II* was far less linear than the original. In many places it was safer to keep running instead of trying to fight the androids, so I introduced the flying kick as a way to attack while moving. This meant that the fighting was a bit more hectic compared to the original where you had to stop in an exact place. For a free-roaming game, it seemed more suitable and kept the action moving."



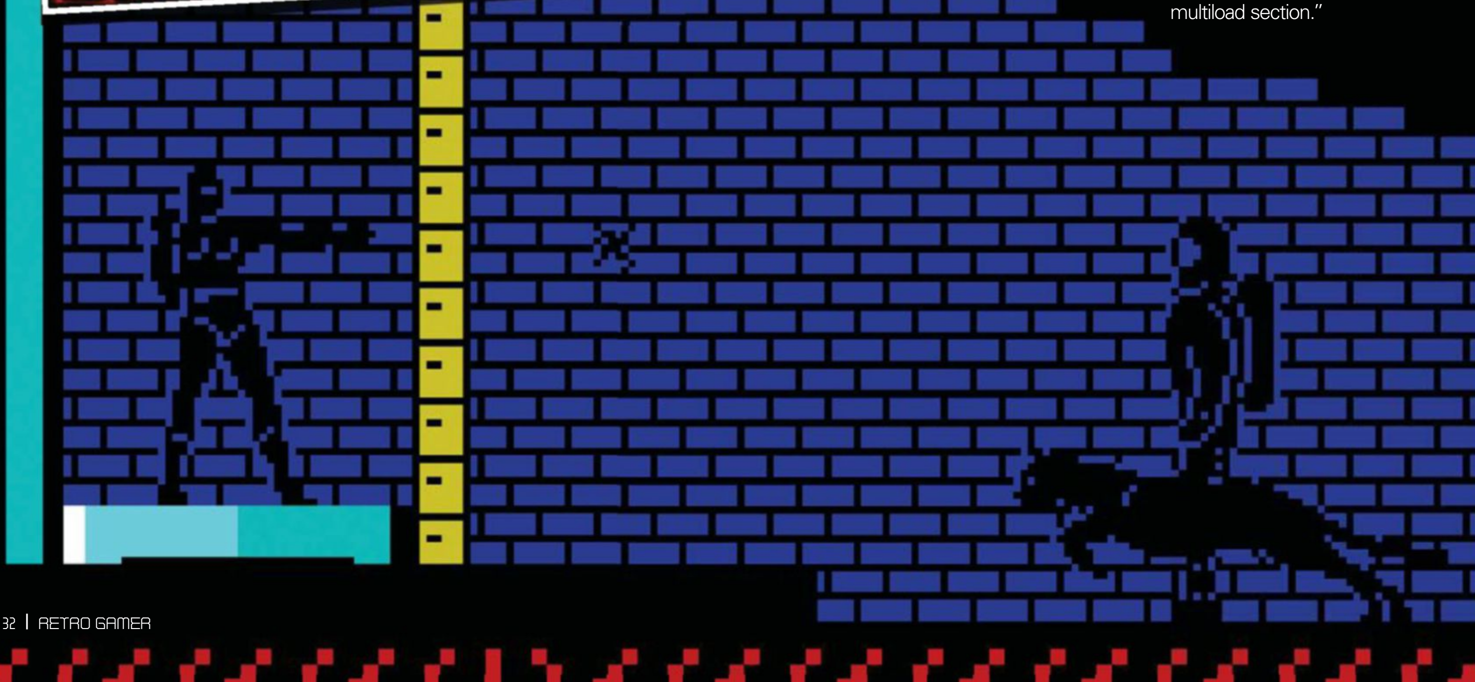
» [ZX Spectrum] Careful positioning is required before jumping between these precariously-sited platforms.

> "I wanted the player to feel that they were part of a story"
> Clive Townsend

A second side effect of *Saboteur II*'s expansive playfield resulted in Clive implementing a lift system, although the designer argues that this was inherited from *Saboteur*. "I tried to set both games in a semi-realistic environment. Even in the original game there was an unseen lift. In the sequel, I again tried to make sure the bad guy's lair would actually function. Unfortunately many of the extra – and secret – rooms were missed out due to memory limitations, so I could only hint at them by showing 'unopenable' doors."

The pickups required to finish missions would also differentiate the sequel from its predecessor, although Clive now jokingly questions their specifics. "The tape was to imply that a large Seventies computer was being used. I think I'd been looking at too many old computers in old films! It should probably have been a huge Winchester disk drive, but the plot involved collecting numerous items. Perhaps I should have chosen CDs – at least they would have made good shuriken!"

But one aspect that Clive decided his sequel should share with *Saboteur* was that the follow-up should have an impressive escape scene, which was restricted to a single motorbike, as the developer explains: "Due to memory constraints, there wasn't an option to add a chase. That probably would have been a game in its own right, or at least a multiload section."



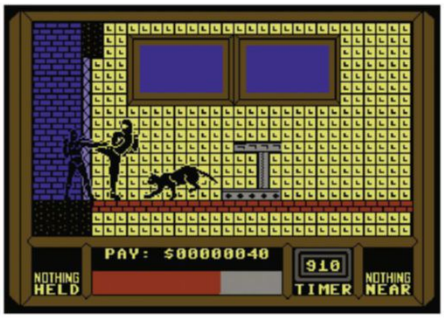


CONVERSION CAPERS



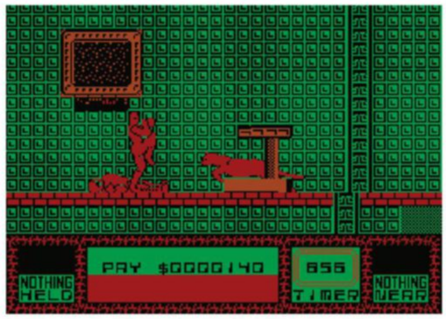
AMSTRAD CPC

■ Although identical in terms of gameplay, the Amstrad version of *Saboteur II* runs at a slower speed and uses a slightly different colour palette than the original. The Amstrad version of *Saboteur II* benefits from having alternate colours, but the game's lag does cause issues with flying kicks.



COMMODORE 64

■ In contrast to the CPC *Saboteur II*, the C64 conversion is far faster than the original. This gives the Commodore port's ninja quicker healing power, to the point where she can often power-up while being attacked. To balance things out, the C64 version's missions feature more foes than its counterparts.



PC DOS

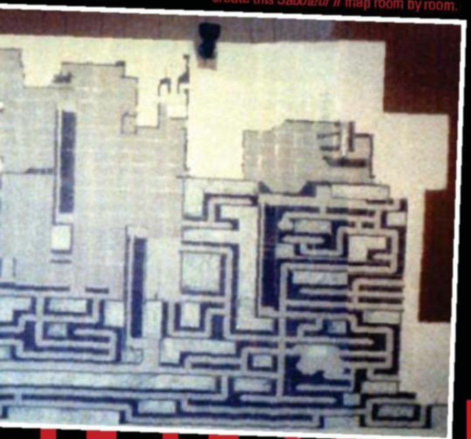
■ The DOS port of *Saboteur II* isn't that bad; it runs at the same speed and plays identically to the original, and its graphics, although short on colours, are pretty decent. On the downside, the PC version suffers from horrendous pregame music and its cover depicts a male sword-wielding ninja.

Also in keeping with *Saboteur*, was that dollars, rather than points, would reward progress, although this seemingly didn't sit well with Nina – *Saboteur II*'s heroine – being motivated by vengeance. "I wanted the player to feel that they were part of a story instead of playing a game. So a 'pay' rather than 'points' system was used. Not much is known about Nina's brother's death – 'Avenging Angel' was just an operational codename used for this particular mission."

As for the choice of the name given to the heroine in *Saboteur II*, Clive offers a simple answer and reveals why his game's loading screen depicts Nina wearing an outfit stamped with heart and halo insignia. "Nina was the name of my girlfriend. She collected a comic called Angel Love, which incorporated a small heart and halo in its logo. So I added that to the loading screen."

Unfortunately, Clive's progress on *Saboteur II* was delayed, as the designer's skills were needed elsewhere. "Rob White was finding the games industry increasingly risky. So he decided to start work on the first version of Insurance Master. *Saboteur II* was put on hold while I worked on its graphical interface."

» Clive Townsend used a Spectrum thermal printer to create this *Saboteur II* map room by room.



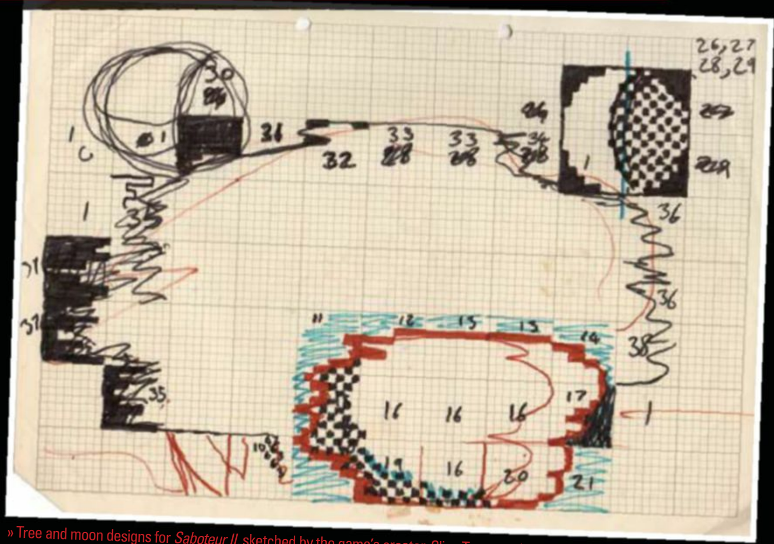


» [ZX Spectrum] An undocumented room in *Saboteur II* contains a chest that gives the ninja unlimited health.

Following this brief sojourn into business software design, Clive got back to finishing off his *Saboteur* sequel, which the designer remembers receiving a warm reception on its release. "I was very pleased at how well the game sold and the great reviews – it was awarded a *Your Sinclair* 'Megagame'."

Like Clive's original *Saboteur*, its sequel was designed for the ZX Spectrum before being converted to various other systems. Clive remembers getting help with the Amstrad port and regretting not having input into the C64 version. "Maz Spork was an essential asset when it came to the Amstrad CPC version. He'd developed an interrupt system to change the palette as the screen was drawn, allowing more than four colours on the screen. But I wish I'd spent more time making the Amstrad CPC version faster. I wasn't involved with the C64 port, but if I had been I would have made sure they didn't butcher my loading screen! And it didn't have the awesome Rob Hubbard music. Crazy."

The developer's criticism of the C64 *Saboteur II* pales, however, in comparison with his unapologetic review of the DOS version of his game, which sported box art and instructions depicting and describing a male ninja with a sword while featuring a female heroine in-game



» Tree and moon designs for *Saboteur II*, sketched by the game's creator, Clive Townsend.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SABOTEUR (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1985

SABOTEUR II
SYSTEM: ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1987

COOL BRICKS
SYSTEM: GAME BOY COLOR
YEAR: 1999

minus a blade. "It's annoying when front covers completely misrepresent the game. With the cover for the first game, people were disappointed that the ninja didn't get a machine gun in the game – so we didn't make that mistake with the sequel's cover. Then someone redraws it with a sword! Fools."

But as well as criticisms of its conversions, Clive has more than a few things he would have done differently with *Saboteur II* given the chance. Ultimately, though, the designer is happy to have his ninja stealth sequel remembered after so many years. "There are *many* things I would have changed if I could. If I'd 'wasted' memory on some tables for the graphical routines I could have made the game run faster. But what's pleasing is the fact that it's been remembered for 30 years."

Many thanks to Clive Townsend for revisiting *Saboteur II*.



Sinclair QL fact

■ Other than its smaller data and address buses, the Motorola 68008 CPU used in the Sinclair QL is identical to the popular Motorola 68000 used in the Amiga, Mega Drive and Neo-Geo.

RAM: 128KB (EXPANDABLE TO 640KB)
GRAPHICS: ZX8301 (EIGHT COLOURS, 256X256 / FOUR COLOURS, 512X256)
PROCESSOR: MOTOROLA 68008 (7.5MHZ)
OPERATING SYSTEM: 48KB QDOS ROM
MEDIA: 2X MICRODRIVE (85KB MINIMUM)

Sinclair QL

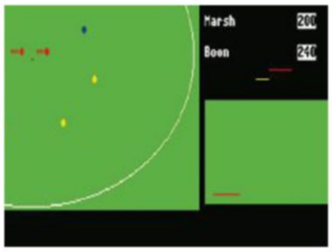
» MANUFACTURER: Sinclair Research **» YEAR:** 1984 **» COST:** £399 (launch), £100+ (today)

After its success in selling the ZX80, ZX81 and ZX Spectrum to the British public, Sinclair Research shifted its focus to the business computing market with the Sinclair QL (the initials in its name standing for 'Quantum Leap'). Sinclair's goal was to leverage the low-cost model that had served it well in the home market, providing a powerful machine based around a Motorola 68008 CPU while still undercutting the IBM PC and Apple Macintosh. Rather than employing floppy disks or cassette tapes, Sinclair's proprietary Microdrive tape loop cartridges were used as the system's primary storage device.

Though launched in January 1984, the Sinclair QL wasn't actually ready for production and delayed orders frustrated customers. Worse yet, when the system finally arrived, it was plagued with problems. Early Microdrives were unreliable and the initial operating system wasn't just buggy, but larger than the 32KB ROM on the machine, necessitating an additional ROM cartridge. The QL was a bust – business owners weren't sold on the machine, and the scarcity of games turned off home users. Production of the computer was suspended in 1985 due to a lack of demand, and the coffin was nailed shut when Amstrad purchased Sinclair Research in April 1986. *

EDITOR'S CHOICE International Cricket

In many ways, the game of cricket is a lot like the Sinclair QL – it revels in its idiosyncrasies and is unmistakeably British. As a result, a cricket game feels like a perfect match for this powerful but under-exploited platform. You're able to take on the Australians in a one-day or test match, and a two-player mode is available if you have a QL-friendly companion who doesn't mind the odd googly. It's a bright and appealing game, and it's now been made freely available online, making it one of the more accessible releases on this surprisingly expensive platform.





It's the game that propelled Sega into the big time and gave shoot-'em-up fans a whole new perspective to their favourite genre. Retro Gamer looks back at this classic isometric blaster

A quick glance through the arcade games released in 1982 reveals few surprises. *Pac-Man* clones and platform games were still thriving, despite the innovation of a minor number of games, and after a bumper few years, the popular shoot-'em-up genre appeared to be on the wane. Yet soon to be sitting atop that cadre of groundbreaking titles was *Zaxxon*, an isometric shoot-'em-up of not inconsiderable fame and pedigree, and a notable chapter in arcade history for several reasons. Naturally, *Zaxxon* itself is mildly derivative. Almost a year earlier, Konami had released another seminal shooter, *Scramble* (see **Retro Gamer** 169), in which the player had to traverse a constantly-scrolling landscape, shooting down enemies and fuel drums in order to frequently (and somewhat paradoxically) replenish their own supply. *Scramble* was a huge hit, setting the template for many arcade shoot-'em-ups to come, including *Zaxxon*, which was developed by Sega, and the legendary Japanese giant's first major hit in the arcades.

As with many early arcade games originating in Japan, the creative minds behind *Zaxxon* are difficult to confirm. The company Ikegami Tsushinki is often quoted as involved on development, with its logo buried deep within the ROM for the game. What Ikegami Tsushinki's level of involvement was is unknown, as is the development ▶



» [Arcade] The action hots up very quickly in *Zaxxon*.


XON
100 PTS
200
500 PTS
300 PTS
200 PTS

ZAXXON

ZAPPING ZAXXON

How to master Sega's isometric blaster

SHOOT TO FUEL



■ As with *Scramble*, shooting fuel dumps is essential in order to keep your craft in the air. Early stages require occasional refuelling, but beware: as the game progresses, the player's fuel supply depletes faster, making the destruction of these flammable installations vital.

GROUND SPACESHIPS



■ *Zaxxon* has a risk-reward aspect to each level. Dotted around on the latter part of every fortress lay dormant enemy fighters, waiting to be launched against the player. Take out these and their number is reduced, making it easier to survive and get that special bonus.

SATELLITES



■ As you might expect, the outer space section that sits in the middle of each level contains no handy fuel dumps for the player to zap. In order to avoid running out of gas, the player must instead destroy the satellites that rapidly traverse the screen.

STAY LOW



■ A height of around 1-1.5 on the altimeter is a good level to lurk at. Here, the fighter can destroy ground units, but their fire will pass harmlessly underneath the player. Always keep an eye out for those brick and laser walls, however, as you'll need to ascend to navigate the gaps.

USING WALLS



■ A particular element of the isometric viewpoint that took players a while to adapt to was negotiating the small fighter through the many wall gaps. The trick here is to use the ship's lasers to ascertain whether you're about to fly through a gap… or make a mess.

MISSILE MAYHEM



■ At the end of each fortress lurks the gigantic robot, complete with a lethal missile. This missile can be taken out mid-air, but to destroy Zaxxon itself the missile needs to be shot six times while primed. On approach, lurk to the right and halfway up the screen and blast away!



» [Arcade] The giant robot Zaxxon approaches – aim for the missile!

team in-house at Sega, but one thing is most likely: the pitch for *Zaxxon* was '*Scramble* in 3D', or rather, the isometric format we've all become so familiar with. The first arcade shoot-'em-up to be displayed in such a way, *Zaxxon*'s graphics are, to be more accurate, axonometric (a term for which the game used part of for its title), simulating three dimensions of view from a third-person perspective, an isometric projection. The effect is enhanced with a helpful shadow as the player's craft banks and dips within the display.

And there is plenty of banking and dipping to be done in *Zaxxon*, despite the paper-thin nature of its plot and premise. Piloting a sleek spaceship armed with a rapid-fire laser, the player must cross the many fortress bases of Asteroid City, destroying enemy emplacements and fuel bunkers while dodging missiles, robust brick walls and skittish energy shields. Housed more commonly in a familiar stand-up unit, *Zaxxon* stood out in arcades thanks to its bright blue logo, which flashed on the marquee and its sides, while a standard cocktail unit was also produced by Sega. Control is rendered via an aircraft-style flight stick which contains a fire button in addition to two further buttons that serve the same purpose.

The isometric perspective meant the game scrolls diagonally upwards from left to right as the player pilots their craft in the two dimensions available (the scrolling could not be stopped, or even slowed), up and down, and to the left and right. Below the spaceship is a helpful shadow, and this is supported with an altimeter that sits just to the left of the action. Mastering these two elements is key should your craft stay in the air for any considerable length of time. Two common methods of demise awaited the player: a host of static obstacles, varying in height and width, every one capable of downing your craft instantly, pepper each level, along with missile-spewing emplacements. The

> "ZAXXON SOLD. IT WENT STRAIGHT TO NUMBER ONE"
>
> John Garcia

hazards force the plane to utilise a variety of heights – anyone caught lurking at the top of the screen will soon find a homing missile bearing down on them.

At the end of each fortress, empty space beckons once more… except it isn't quite empty, as the enemy's fighters (coincidentally very similar to your own craft) descend upon your lone fighter. An interesting risk-reward mechanic lays here: throughout the first fortress segment sit several dormant fighters. Should a brave pilot drop to the hazardous ground level and take out these ships, a reduced enemy fleet at the end of the level is their reward. Finally, the enemy headquarters scrolls into view, an abridged fortress section containing a more nefarious clutch of obstructions and enemies that eventually gives way to a giant robot, the 'Zaxxon' of the game's title. Destroy it by shooting its homing missile with your lasers, and it is back to the start for another fortress and another wave.

Thanks to an expensive TV advertising campaign (one of the first videogames to receive such exposure) and no doubt assisted by the general obsessiveness with all things sci-fi circa the early Eighties, *Zaxxon* was a huge hit for Sega. Unsurprisingly, the hardware driving the game saw its debut here and was even coined as the Sega *Zaxxon* board, utilising Sega's favoured Zilog Z80 chip, with 256 colours and up to 8 colours per sprite. Like most arcade games of the era, it



ZAXXON SEQUELS



SUPER ZAXXON

ARCADE, 1982

■ Boasting even more colour than its illustrious forebear, *Super Zaxxon* is more update than direct sequel. The graphics, scenario and sound effects are almost identical, although the final boss has been replaced with a cute-looking dragon that is reminiscent of characters like Yoshi. Still good fun, but nowhere near as successful as the original, spelling an end to the series in the arcades.



ZAXXON 3-D

MASTER SYSTEM, 1987

■ Released years after the two original arcade games, *Zaxxon 3-D* was designed to work with the Master System's 3D Glasses and switched the action to a behind-the-ship view, while retaining the up-down and left-right movement. Much of the speed of the arcade game is sacrificed here, and while it was no doubt a novel experience when played with the glasses, it's in truth, a rather mediocre shoot-'em-up.



ZAXXON MOTHERBASE 2000

32X, 1995

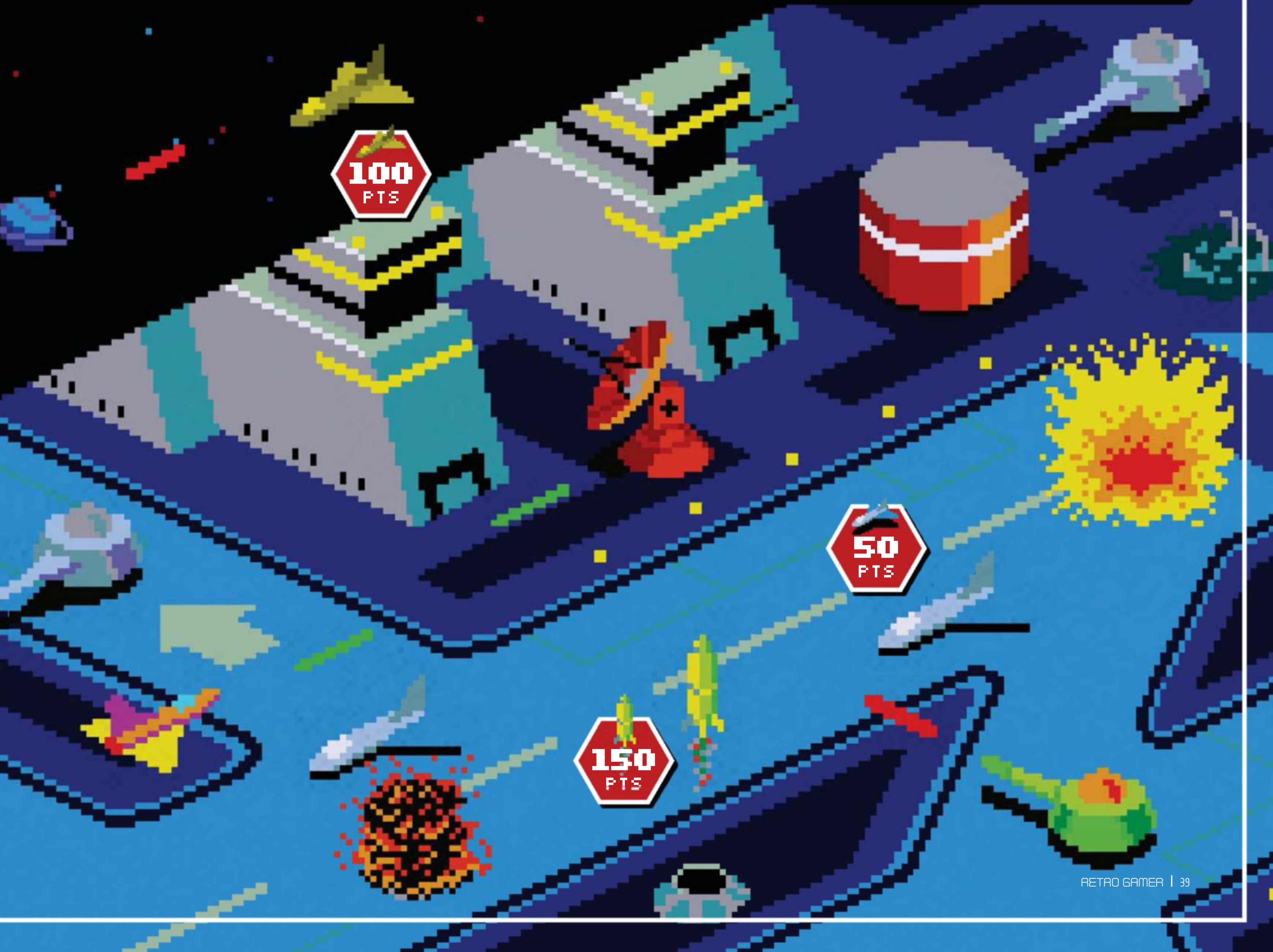
■ Eight years after the Master System's game, the franchise was resurrected again, this time for the doomed 32X. It's a curious mix of a game. The isometric view makes a welcome return and there are some spiffing polygonal sprites; yet the game's famous USP, free vertical movement has gone in favour of a frustrating jump mechanic.



ZAXXON ESCAPE

ANDROID, 2012

■ Sadly unavailable on app stores at the time of writing this, *Zaxxon Escape* was *Zaxxon* brought into the 21st century, and once more the viewpoint was shifted to behind the player's craft, and a mobile-friendly endless runner format was bolted on. As a standalone title it's fun enough, although *Zaxxon Escape* is a little frustrating, given the imprecise and frustrating phone-flicking controls.



ZAXXON

CONVERSION CAPERS



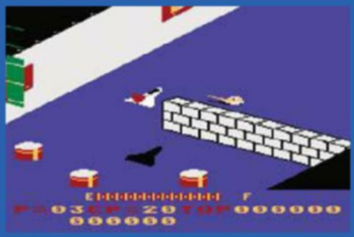
APPLE II

■ Sparse and farty Spectrum-esque sound aside, this is actually a decent effort from Datasoft's John Garcia. With the Apple's lack of dedicated graphics assist, the game chugs a little, but it's nonetheless an accurate rendition of the arcade game.

ATARI 2600

■ No attempt is made to replicate the arcade game's isometric viewpoint, which may have been necessary, but makes the whole exercise a little redundant. The game runs smoothly and has robust 2600 sound effects, but it's not *Zaxxon.*





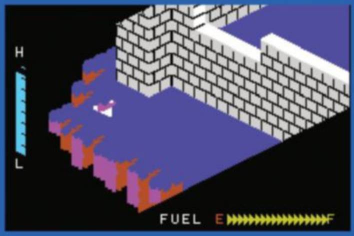
ATARI 5200

■ The isometric view was retained for the 5200 conversion and despite a couple of omissions (no homing missiles and you can't move up and down in the space section), it's a solid game. Backdrops are sparse, but it's entertaining, and fun to play.

ATARI 400/800

■ Perhaps unsurprising considering both were coded by Ron Fortier, the Atari 8-bit port of *Zaxxon* is virtually identical to the 5200 version, albeit slightly quicker and with marginally less beefy sound effects.





COLECO ADAM

■ Confusingly named as *Zaxxon Super Game,* and not to be confused with the arcade follow-up *Super Zaxxon,* this port replaced many of the aspects missing from the ColecoVision, thus making it a more faithful experience.

COLECOVISION

■ Probably the best of the early *Zaxxon* conversions, this ColecoVision port has one major flaw in its jerky scrolling. Other than this, it even adds some roving flying saucer enemies and an odd-looking Zaxxon robot.





COMMODORE 64

■ This benefits from smooth scrolling and functional graphics, but is let down by its speed. Slower than the arcade game, and many other conversions, the sound is also disappointing by the computer's lofty standards.

INTELLIVISION

■ Like the 2600 port, the Intellivision shifts the viewpoint to behind the player's craft but retains the height movement. As a bizarre amalgam of *Zaxxon* and *River Raid*, it works adequately but is frustrating, and not faithful to the original.





MSX

■ Two similar ports of *Zaxxon* were produced for the MSX, with the development differing between its Western and Eastern regions. They're both straight ports of other versions with the first one from 1983 and the second a couple of years later.

PC BOOTER

■ The restrictions of early PC gaming hamper *Zaxxon* terminably here. In a game where deft controls and movement are a must, the slow reaction times of the PC keystrokes destroy much of the games playability.





SG-1000

■ It's a shame the scrolling is so slow and jerky on this conversion, as it ruins the experience to a fair degree. Its sound effects and music are also ear-grindingly bad, which is a shame as it's an accurate conversion that is moderately fun to play.

TRS-80

■ Given the restraints of the hardware, this is an admirable effort at porting *Zaxxon* to the Tandy computer. Most of the game is recognisable at least, however there's a tendency for the display to get very messy during the fortress sections.





TRS-80 COCO

■ Tandy's Color Computer was a huge departure from its earlier TRS-80 computer and its version of *Zaxxon* is streets ahead graphically. The display is still somewhat bare, but it moves sharply, and has a decent stab at recreating the *Zaxxon* robot.

ZX SPECTRUM

■ Published by US Gold, the Spectrum port of *Zaxxon* is lamentable. Slow, bland and frustrating to play, it was even worse than US Gold's own clone, *Blue Max*, from a year earlier. The horrible ticking noise is the icing on an unpleasant cake.





PLAYSTATION 2

■ This arcade-perfect duplication of *Zaxxon* features as an unlockable within the *Sega Mega Drive* collection. Collect one Chaos Emerald (by collecting 50 rings and then jumping through a giant ring) and *Zaxxon* arcade is yours to play.

XBOX 360/ PLAYSTATION 3

■ Sega's follow up to *Mega Drive Collection*, *Ultimate Collection*, featured a range of famous Sega arcade games. Once more an unlockable extra, this port of *Zaxxon* is arcade perfect.



was score-attack-based in nature, given it simply looped around endlessly (or rather, until all the player's lives were lost). A sequel was inevitable, although perhaps it would be better to call *Super Zaxxon* an update rather than sequel. Proffering an-almost identical style of gameplay, it's a reskinned version of the original game, albeit with the removal of its regular space battles. And here the *Zaxxon* arcade story comes to abrupt end, although the engine of the same name did see further action in Sega's *Congo Bongo* and *Future Spy*, along with a brace of unreleased games. But perhaps most pertinently, given the arcade game's popularity, *Zaxxon* received an almost record number of home ports, with seemingly every format of the time getting a version of Sega's famous shoot-'em-up, except, notably, the Amstrad CPC.

Yet strangely, despite the innovation, isometric shoot-'em-ups in the arcade failed to take off in any great measure, post-*Zaxxon*. By 1985, Sega was focusing on its peripheral-driven machines (such as *OutRun* and *Space Harrier*) and the genre had fallen back into its 2D ways. After the initial excitement of the fancy graphics, it appeared gamers failed to appreciate *Zaxxon*'s unique method of gameplay that eschewed the twitchy blast anything that moves style common before and since. Nevertheless, there is no doubting *Zaxxon*'s place at the top table of classic coin-op games. Switch that quick glance to a stroll through an arcade in 1982, and we bet it would be there, that roaring echoey engine noise and sharp, beautiful graphics enticing 10p coins out of your pocket so once more the fight could be taken to the curiously undefined enemy forces of the titular rectangular robot.



» [Arcade] Pesky laser barriers pepper each level – hitting them means instant death.

Q&A: JOHN GARCIA

We chat to the man behind the Apple II port of Zaxxon



How did you come to work over at Datasoft?
I saw a 'game programmers' advert for them and went for my first interview in the industry. The pay was ridiculously low but it came with the promise of a percentage at the back end. I was 33. My boss, Mark Riley was somewhere around 17.

What was your impression of playing *Zaxxon* in the arcades?
My first encounter with *Zaxxon* was memorable. A friend and I walked into the arcade and were instantly drawn towards the *Zaxxon* machine with its far superior graphics to anything else at the time. The isometric graphics and colourful palette were like nothing I'd seen before. Imagine my surprise when through a sequence of random events at Datasoft, I was offered to program the game.

Did you have help with the converstion or did you go at it alone?
I did receive a lot of help from the other programmers working on other versions of the game, such as Ron Fortier who coded the Atari 400/800 version, and Steve Bjork who did the Tandy Color Computer. We worked like fiends for over a year, every day from 10am to at least 10pm. It was an incredible bonding experience that still unites us today.

What were the challenges in converting this – for the time – complex arcade game?
The first hurdle was to learn how to play the game as the only reference we had was a *Zaxxon* coin-op machine. I played the game for hours, days, weeks and then all at once mastered it. As it turned out, that was the easy part. It took a fair amount of time blocking out the art within a proper isometric view, and the problem that plagued the Apple was the lack of graphics hardware assist. It was bad enough the CPU had to manage all the moving objects – in *Zaxxon*, the background also moved!

What did you think of the final result?
I think that it was as good a translation as it could've been for the Apple II. Reducing the 256 colours of the arcade game took its toll, and getting the screen to scroll diagonally seriously impacted framerate. But on the positive side, I think the gameplay was the most accurate of all the conversions.

Was the game successful?
One thing was for sure: *Zaxxon* sold. It went straight into number one and hovered around the top of the charts for a long time. For me, personally, it was the start of a new career, as having retained several points at the back end, I was able to start my own company. I don't think I'd have done anything differently. That was as good as it gets.

THE BOARD GAME

■ The term 'loosely-based' is apt here, but it's still lovely to see arcade games made into board games. Taking the hexagons of the third stage as its basis, Milton Bradley's game repeats the target of destroying the titular robot and is a touch more complex than its other videogame-based board games.

CLASSIC MOMENTS

The Immortal

» PLATFORM: MEGA DRIVE **» DEVELOPER:** SANDCASTLE **» RELEASED:** 1991

Despite their frail frames, years of watching movies, reading *The Lord Of The Rings* and playing *Dungeons & Dragons* has taught us that wizards are not to be messed with. Take the star of *The Immortal* for example. He looks fairly weedy in his nondescript grey garbs, but this staff-wielding master of the arcane is not to be messed with.

He's just as dangerous close up as he is at range, and he dispatches his enemies with all sorts of gruesome attacks, from turning them to stone, to beheading or even slicing them in half. His best trick by far is to touch an opponent's head with his trusty staff, causing the unfortunate monster's bonce to swell uncontrollably and explode in a shower of gore and viscera. Eww. *



BIO

Originally released for the Apple IIGS, and planned as an online multiplayer RPG, Will Harvey's game ended up being very different. Rather unusually, you took on the mantle of a wizard who was tasked with uncovering the fate of a man named Dunric, only to discover that the path to the missing man was filled with dangerous enemies, deadly traps and all manner of evil hazards. While its real-time battle engine was rather primitive for the time, it did allow you to pull off gross fatalities before they became commonplace in the likes of *Mortal Kombat*.



MORE CLASSIC THE IMMORTAL MOMENTS

It's A Trap!



Will Harvey clearly has an evil streak running through him, because *The Immortal*'s very first room contains a nasty trap that will kill you if you're not careful. Let's just say that if you don't heed the warnings to move, you'll end up as lunch for a hungry monstrous worm. Don't say we didn't warn you.

A Spidery Demise



One level of *The Immortal* is filled with dangerous spiders. After gingerly crawling through a spider-infested tunnel you immediately came face to face with a gigantic specimen, which blocks your progress. Trying to bypass it results in thousands of babies crawling over your body and consuming you alive, so you're going to have to fight it to proceed.

Magic Carpet Ride



Although your wizard is happy to navigate the dungeon on foot, some levels of it are simply too dangerous to traverse that way. Luckily, you gain access to a flying carpet halfway through the game that you can use to move around more freely. Careful, though, as poor timing will result in you and your carpet becoming one big pile of ash.

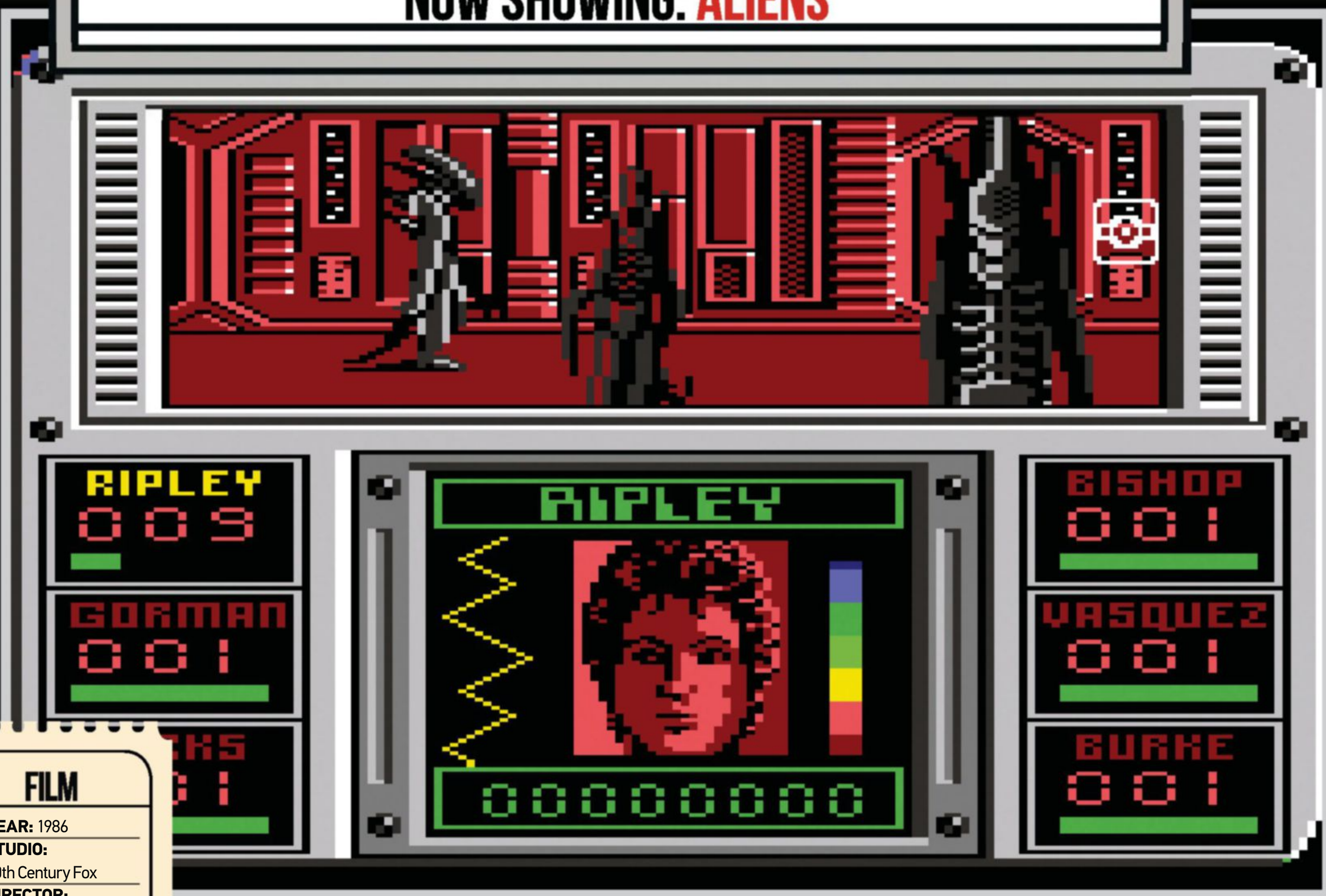
Here Be Dragons



You're on the last stage and a huge dragon is slowly rising up in front of you, ready to belch forth a stream of flaming death. Desperately, you try to think of a way to get out of your predicament, before you're burned to a cinder. Too late, you made the wrong choice and now you're dragon food. Maybe next time you'll be luckier…

LICENCE TO THRILL

NOW SHOWING: ALIENS



FILM

» **YEAR:** 1986
» **STUDIO:** 20th Century Fox
» **DIRECTOR:** James Cameron
» **STARRING:** Sigourney Weaver, Michael Biehn, Paul Reiser, Carrie Henn, Bill Paxton, Lance Henriksen
» **BUDGET:** $18,500,000 (Estimated)
» **BOX OFFICE:** $85,200,000 (US)

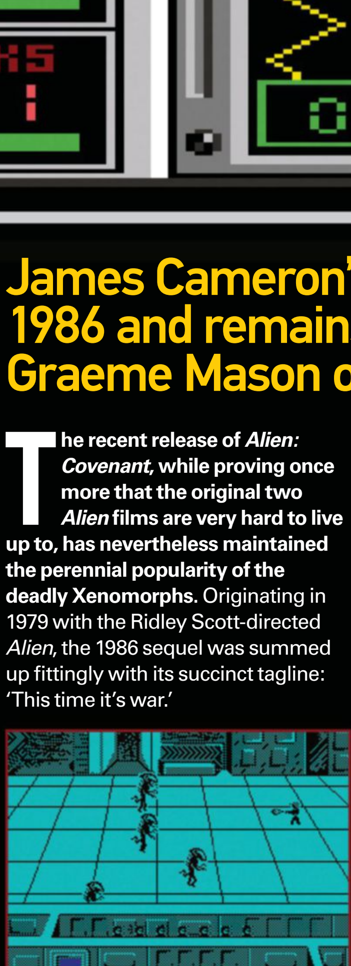
GAME

HOME COMPUTERS
» **YEAR:** 1986
» **PUBLISHER:** Activision/Electric Dreams
» **DEVELOPER:** Mr Micro/Software Studios

ARCADE
» **YEAR:** 1990
» **PUBLISHER:** Konami
» **DEVELOPER:** In-house

James Cameron's hit sequel was released in cinemas in 1986 and remains a revered entry in the franchise. Join Graeme Mason on the hunt for its videogame adaptations

The recent release of *Alien: Covenant,* while proving once more that the original two *Alien* films are very hard to live up to, has nevertheless maintained the perennial popularity of the deadly Xenomorphs. Originating in 1979 with the Ridley Scott-directed *Alien,* the 1986 sequel was summed up fittingly with its succinct tagline: 'This time it's war.'



» [ZX Spectrum] Defending Ops in the US version.

Aliens begins 57 years after the events of the first film. Adrift in the escape capsule of the space freighter Nostromo, Ellen Ripley (together with that irascible ginger tom, Jones) is the sole human survivor of the deadly creature, brought aboard via a fellow crew member's close encounter with one of those nasty Facehuggers. Held accountable for the deliberate destruction of valuable company property, Ripley is stripped of her flight officer credentials and forced into a lowly job aboard the space station Gateway. Given a shot at redemption and the chance to confront her fears, she is initially reluctant, before incessant nightmares persuade our heroine to take a trip back to LV-426, where the human colony subsequently placed there has gone abruptly silent. Accompanied by a team of gung-ho and supremely arrogant marines, it's not long before Ripley is face to face once more with her biggest fear.

James Cameron wrote and directed *Aliens*, hot off the success of another futuristic flick, *The Terminator.* Having had a sci-fi script of his own rejected by the producers David Giler and Walter Hill, James Cameron was offered *Alien 2,* a proposed sequel to the hit Ridley Scott film. Combining elements of his own script with the established tropes of the nascent franchise, he came up with a treatment that expanded the *Alien* universe, and in a completely different style to the first movie. Where *Alien* was claustrophobic and tense, *Aliens* would be more open and action-packed. From the enclosed walls of



» [Arcade] Ripley blast aliens astride the APC.



» [Amstrad CPC] A destroyed door can only mean one thing: Xenomorphs are near!

the commercial freighter Nostromo to the mass of open corridors and wind-swept and freshly oxygenated Acheron landscape, Cameron made the masterstroke of introducing an overconfident, bullish and ultimately ineffectual squad of marines to the scenario, a thinly-veiled comment on America's recent involvement in the Vietnam war. An almost-but-not-quite romance and the key mother-daughter relationship between Ripley and the colony's sole survivor, Newt, added an extra emotional weight that would undercut the macho false bravado of the soldiers; the result was a perfect storm of an ugly, seemingly unbeatable alien menace, cutting-edge model work and a tight, taut script that relentlessly dragged the viewer to its explosive conclusion.

Bidding for the videogame versions of *Aliens* was fierce – even before the film completed, shooting anticipation was high. One company focusing on movie licences was Activison and its UK base of operations, Electric Dreams. "It was a reflection of the market at the time," recalls Rod Cousens, CEO of Electric Dreams. "And we wanted the marketing muscles to establish videogames as a form of mainstream entertainment. We won some and we lost some – Ocean and US Gold were formidable competitors!" With Rod having secured the deal, design pitches were handed out to Activision's development studios, and unusually, two different designs were accepted. "We thought that both treatments were strong and deserved to come to market," explains Rod, "and the motion picture company supported our endeavours."

The result was the first two games based on the hit film (there would be more to follow, but we'll come to them soon), and two games greatly differing in style and content. Jon Dean was boss of Activision's Software Studios development team. "Most movies were signed very early before there was much more to see than a script and the possibility of some named stars. My guess is US Gold and Ocean would have been bidding for *Aliens*, as it was a sequel and a known property. However, Activision's advantage was that they could offer global distribution." The Software Studios version of *Aliens* was a first-person shooter, with tile-based movement and the plot of the movie distilled down to one central mission: reclaim control of the human base, while keeping your team alive. Jon continues, "The references we ▶

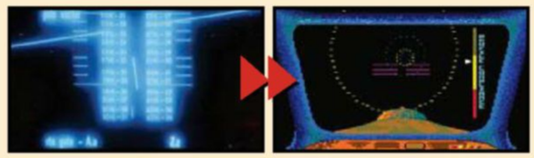
MOVIE TO GAME COMPARISON

How the game transitioned from the Silver Screen to the arcades



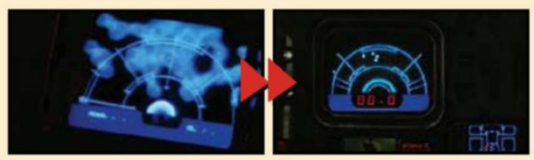
MISSION BRIEFING

This briefing scene takes place aboard the Sulaco and establishes the personalities and dynamic of the marines. Hicks is calm and insouciant, Hudson wisecracking and rebellious, Vasquez pompous and macho. It's replicated early on in the Mr Micro version.



DROPSHIP DROP

In the movie, the marines, Ripley and Burke, safely ensconced inside the APC, board a dropship to descend to LV-426. *Aliens US* puts the player in the role of pilot Corporal Ferro, negotiating the dropship through a series of navigational beacons in a somewhat vexing start to the game.



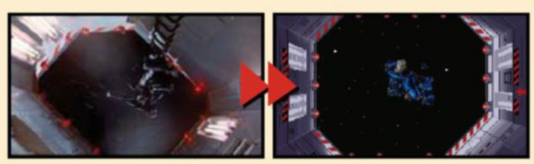
MOTION TRACKER

The motion tracker was an inspired addition and is used several times, most notably in the alien attack on operations. The gadget was seen in *Aliens* and *Alien Trilogy* as part of the player's HUD, before *Aliens Online* used it properly, complete with that terrifying hastening tone.



FINAL SHOWDOWN

Ripley faces off against the alien queen in *Aliens*' conclusion, and uses a conveniently-located cargo loader to put the battle on a more even keel. The Activision/Electric Dreams *Aliens* US game includes a good-looking cut-scene that copies the famous line from this scene.



THE QUEEN IS DEAD

Aliens' conclusion sees Ripley climb into a cargo loader – an industrial-scale exosuit – and take the fight to the alien queen. The scene is semi-realised in the end of *Aliens* arcade: the battle itself differs but the airlock segment remains, and there's a cut-away of the queen's ice-cold demise.

ARTISTIC LICENCE

These weren't in the film…

RIP RIPLEY

■ Admittedly this is a common adaptation issue, but it still feels odd watching Ripley get caught by one of the slobbering Xenos in *Aliens*, and then her heartbeat monitor flatlining.



BIG ALIENS VS NAKED RIPLEY

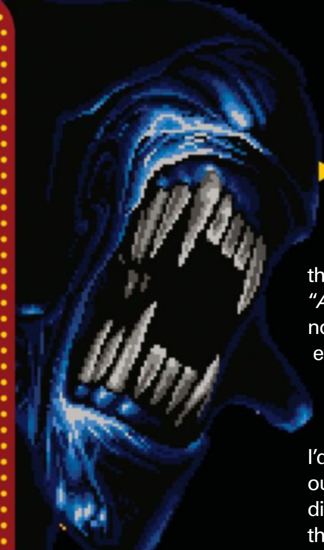
■ Square's *Aliens* MSX game throws a few curveballs, such as this giant soldier alien and an apparently naked Ripley. While our heroine does indeed strip down to her undies in *Alien*, she remains clothed throughout the battles in *Aliens*. multiple idols for big bonuses.



ROCKET LAUNCHER AND WEIRD ALIENS

■ *Aliens* arcade contains a range of off-canon material, and this screenshot sums it up well. We're sure the movie Ripley would have found this rocket launcher quite helpful, and we don't recall those crawling half-human things, either.





"All I had to go on was the original Alien movie"
Mark Eyles

▶ had were the script and some still frames of the various alien models in different stages of transformation." Mark Eyles was the designer and writer for the game. "*Alien* is such a well-known franchise now," he notes, "that it's hard to envisage what it was like getting the script for *Aliens*. As far as how it would look and feel, all I had to go on was the original *Alien* movie that I'd seen at the cinema when it came out." Interestingly, Mark took a much different approach to the game design than the other successful developer, Mr Micro. "I based the game on the premise that the player would create their own story from the locations and characters in the film, and this is my preferred approach. I tried to extract the most salient elements from the script: what was the world like? Who were the main characters? What kind of technology and weapons were they using? Then I used these elements to create the game world and characters," he explains. The alternative, as demonstrated in Mr Micro's design, was to retell the story of the film scene by scene, and both pitches proved popular at Activision. "Marketing them simultaneously as both European and US releases seemed an obvious way of distinguishing the two games," notes Rod Cousens. As was bizarrely common for the time, Fox studios interfered little in the development; videogames in general were still not considered a significant enough property to warrant much effort. As Jon Dean recalls succinctly, "We sent the game in when it was done, and it got approved. That was it." The US version of *Aliens* inevitably represented the movie better, with a

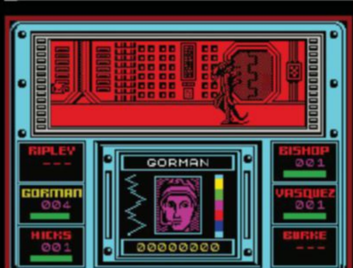


» [C64] This simple sub-game sat at the start of Activision's *Aliens US*.

» [C64] Poor old Gorman, about to get chomped.



NOTABLE VERSIONS



ALIENS (UK)

■ One of two developer pitches that warranted the thumbs up, *Aliens UK* (as it was named by marketing) is our pick of the earlier *Aliens* games. Using a first-person perspective, the player had to guide a team of six characters through the base, eliminating aliens, and of course that pesky egg-laying queen. It's tense and atmospheric.



ALIENS (US)

■ While it may lack the intense nature of the Software Studios interpretation, *Aliens US* is a much more accurate rendition of the movie. There's a dropship-piloting section and a neat first-person part inside the iconic cargo loader. However, over reliance on an oft-repeated dull corridor shooter level lets the game down.



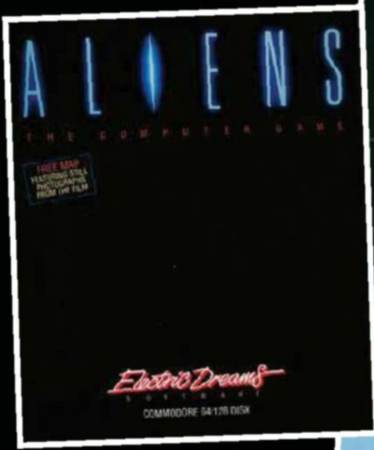
ALIENS: ALIEN 2

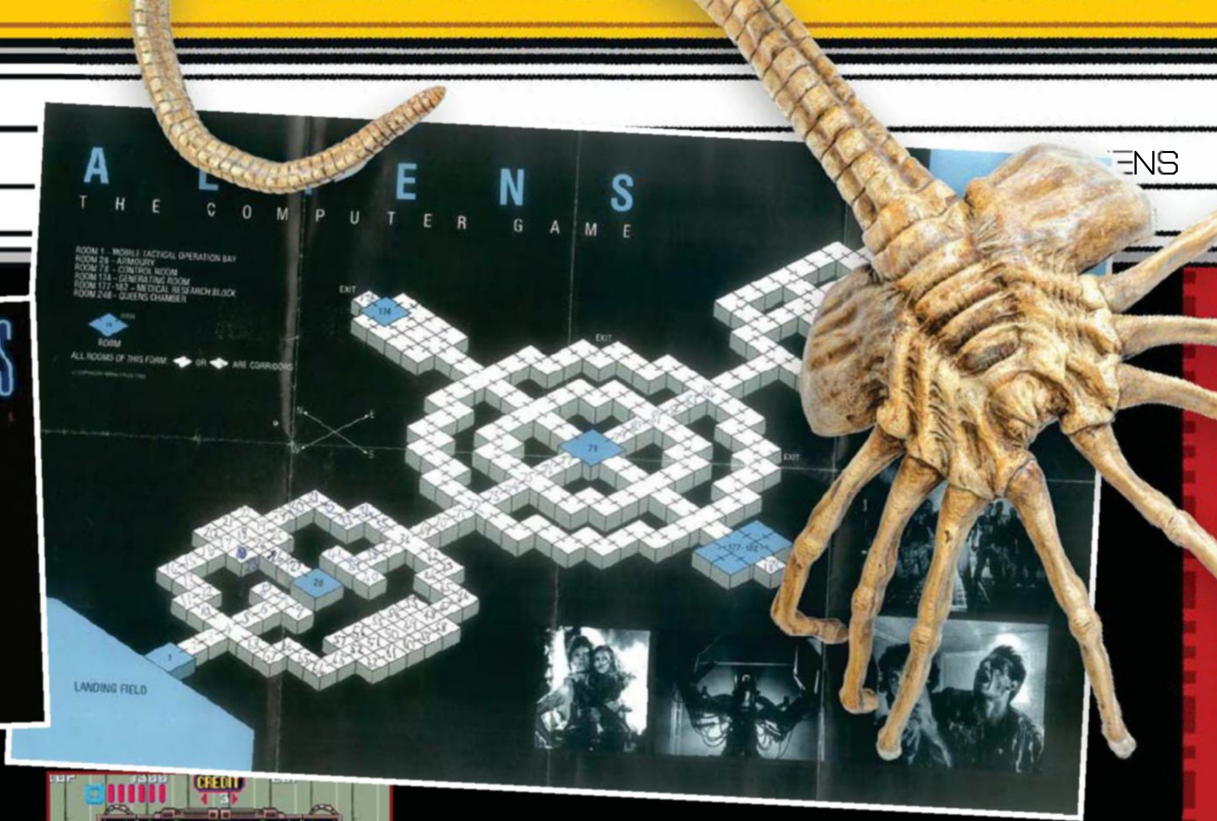
■ Released a few months after Activision's dual versions, *Alien 2* is another oddity in the range of games based on the movie. A side-scrolling shoot-'em-up in the spirit of *Metroid*, it introduces a giant boss alien and Facehugger eggs containing useful weapons. It's a decent game that was released in Japan only.



ALIENS (PUBLIC DOMAIN)

■ This public domain effort appeared on the Atari ST in 1987, a gloriously well-timed stab at hanging somewhat dubiously on the coat tails of the movie. It's a turn-based strategy game and an unremarkable one at that, despite having some nice digitised screens that came from the film itself.





multistage approach that was fast-becoming the template for movie videogames. Which is the better version depends a lot on the player's preference – similarity to the movie, or the nerve-wracking atmosphere and first-person perspective of the UK version?

Much like the pesky Xenomorphs themselves, the videogame adaptations of *Aliens* refused to lie down. Following the release of the Activision/Electric Dreams games, lucky MSX owners got another game, subtitled *Alien 2*, developed by Square and released only in Japan as a side-scrolling platform game that bore no resemblance to the previous games. Then, in 1990, four years after the release of the movie, Konami acquired the licence to create an arcade game of *Aliens*. Released worldwide, this game



» [Arcade] Ripley prepares to take out a purple alien.



» [Arcade] Fortunately, the cargo loader of the arcade game moved much quicker than in the movie.

introduced many new elements to the series as it played fast and loose with *Alien* canon. The game was primarily a side-scrolling run-and-gunner, reminiscent of peers such as *Alien Storm*, peppered with the occasional vehicle section, Ripley herself sitting proudly astride the APC, blasting aliens into a gooey, acidic mess. Despite wandering into new territory with its strange variations of Xenomorphs, *Aliens* arcade followed the film reasonably closely and ended with the famous climactic battle against the Xeno queen. *Alien Trilogy* (PC, Saturn and PlayStation) featured the location and many weapons from *Aliens*, if not its actual plot and characters – save for Ripley and Bishop – while *Aliens Online* pitched multiple players against each other in a first-person shooter that required a GameStorm subscription. Furthermore, many *Aliens* videogames since, such as the Game Boy Color's *Thanatos Encounter*, the PC game *Aliens: A Comic Book Adventure* and 2014's *Alien: Isolation* have lifted themes and objects from James Cameron's movie. Its influence clearly extends far beyond the official adaptations, yet of all the videogames it has spawned, Electric Dreams' original UK version is the closest to the film in terms of atmosphere.

Still regarded by most fans as the pinnacle of the *Alien* franchise, *Aliens* the movie stands up today as a remarkably powerful journey into a violent and industrially imperfect future. We recommend the lean, tight, running time of the original cinematic release – so what are you waiting for soldier, breakfast in bed? ✱



ALIENS (KONAMI)

■ Released four years after the movie, Konami shoe-horned the sci-fi horror flick into a coin-munching run-and-gunner that is certainly enjoyable, despite a few, ahem, deviations from the movie. Colourful, frantic and fun, it's well worth a blast or two, despite its inconsistencies.



ALIEN TRILOGY

■ This is a strange game. It claims to be based on the original three films, yet is a curious mish-mash of them, and is influenced mainly by *Aliens*. There's a slightly weedy-looking pulse rifle, and the levels are very reminiscent of the colony on LV-426. An eccentricity, but one that captures the feel of the series.



ALIENS ONLINE

■ This MMO from 1998 was published by Fox Interactive via the GameStorm subscription service. A team-based shooter, it included interesting facets such as being able to play a Facehugger or queen, and different classes for the marines. After EA acquired GameStorm, servers were shut down. Game Over, man.



ALIENS VS PINBALL

■ We happily admit to having a bit of a soft spot for pinball games here at **Retro Gamer**, and this is a cute little mobile version that contains a dedicated *Aliens* table, among others. Graphics include an APC that fires your ball, Ripley with a pulse rifle, and of course, her nemesis, the evil queen Xenomorph.



Super Scope

» COST: £59.99 (LAUNCH), £20+ (TODAY, BOXED), £10+ (TODAY, LOOSE) **» PLATFORM:** SNES **» RELEASED:** 1992

If there's one thing that console manufacturers agreed on during the Eighties and early Nineties, it was that gamers wanted guns. Nintendo's NES bundle featuring a Zapper and *Duck Hunt* was popular, and if you bought Sega or Atari consoles you could get bundled guns, too. With that in mind, Nintendo kept the tradition going on the SNES with the Super Scope – however, this time it opted to supersize its weaponry. Rather than a pistol shape, the Super Scope took the form of a large bazooka, an unwieldy but visually exciting armament. As it was wireless, the device also required a sensor and batteries to function.

The Super Scope came bundled with a six-game compilation cartridge, including unconventional things like the puzzle game Blastris. This variety proved to be a good thing for Super Scope owners, as the peripheral didn't receive a huge amount of support after launch. Just four other publishers released dedicated Super Scope games, and none of them released more than one. As a result, Nintendo had to provide most of the software support for its peripheral, and the Super Scope ultimately ended up with its initial compilation, eight full games and some bonus minigames on three other cartridges. *

Super Scope Fact

■ The Super Scope was introduced into *Super Smash Bros. Melee* as a weapon for fighters to use, and has since become one of the series' staple items.

ESSENTIAL GAME Tin Star

If you want something a little different then *Tin Star* is the kind of oddball game that might just appeal to you. Taking place in a Wild West setting populated by robots, *Tin Star* offers you a variety of shooting challenges including classic shootouts, object juggling, protection of civilians and general bad guy blasting. The cartoon visuals are excellent and the varied game styles will keep you engaged for longer than more straightforward gun games. Sadly, the game was only released in North America, so you'll need to track down an imported copy.





ARCH RIVALS



Before NBA Jam landed a slam dunk in arcades there was Arch Rivals. Kieren Hawken shoots hoops with the creators of this trendsetting coin-op





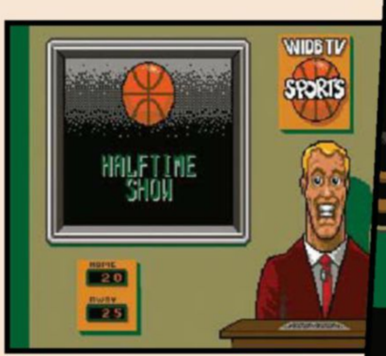
IN THE KNOW

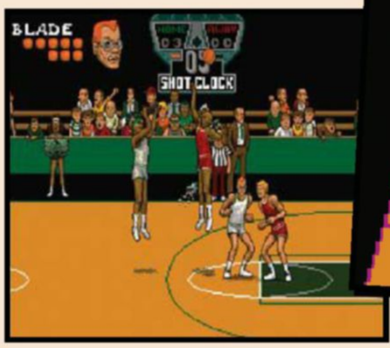
- » **PUBLISHER:** Midway
- » **DEVELOPER:** Midway/Acclaim
- » **RELEASED:** 1989
- » **PLATFORM:** Arcade
- » **GENRE:** Sports

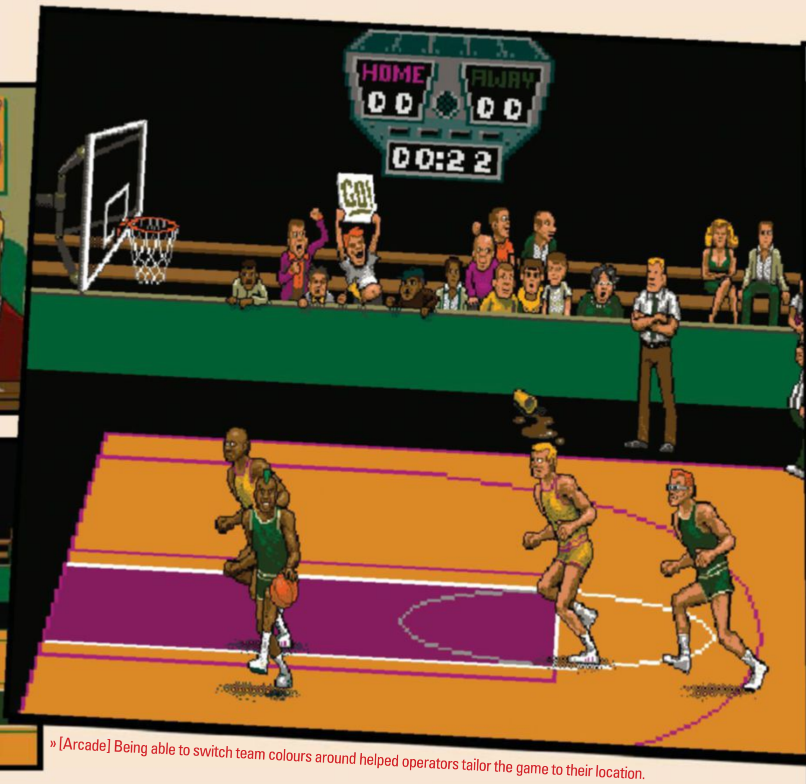
The two talented men behind *Arch Rivals* were Brian Colin and Jeff Nauman, two of the biggest stars in Bally/Midway's coin-op division. If their names don't mean anything then their games certainly will as these guys were responsible for producing arcade classics such as *Rampage*, *Xenophobe*, *Discs Of Tron* and *Spy Hunter*. By 1989, when *Arch Rivals* was released, between them they had created, or at least contributed to, nearly all of Bally/Midway's biggest arcade hits over the last five or so years. Their ideas for new arcade games often came totally out of the blue in pretty unusual circumstances, and *Arch Rivals* was no different, as Jeff cheerfully explains, "I had always wanted to do a sports game, and basketball was the sport I played the most. I also hated the versions of basketball that other people had made as none of them gave you the feeling of actually playing it. I kept thinking about how to do it and, during a flight to Reno, the idea just came to me. So I wrote everything down on a barf bag and couldn't wait to tell Brian about the concept." Brian clearly remembers Jeff's excitement at the idea and the unusual way he presented it. "Jeff came back from a trade show and couldn't wait to show me the concept he had scribbled onto the back of an air-sickness bag during the flight," he says. "His concept was a game that would allow players to use real basketball strategies through the use of a two-man team. I really liked the idea, but I was concerned that while it might have a tremendous appeal for basketball fans, I wanted there to be



» [Arcade] *Arch Rivals* featured two-on-two matches, where you faced off against the AI or another player.







» [Arcade] Being able to switch team colours around helped operators tailor the game to their location.

"The operator could set the names and colours of the four available teams"

Jeff Nauman

something for the average nerd (like me) as well. So I suggested that we add the ability to allow players to blatantly foul other players." And this would become the distinctive hook that *Arch Rivals* would become known for.

So with the key ideas in place, Jeff had to nail down how to bring them together. "The plan was to allow the player to compete in a basketball game using real skills," he says. "I went with a two-on-two setup because it would allow you to play it like a real game. You could pass the ball, set a pick and even double-team someone on defence. The next hurdle was how to make this a game for people who just wanted to have some fun and didn't have to be a sports geek, like Brian! That's where we came up with pulling down their shorts and punching your opponent!" With this, *Arch Rivals* became one of the first videogames to successfully combine sports and violence, something that would soon become very popular, so we wanted to know what made Brian think this would work well. "If the success of *Rampage* taught me anything, it was that players enjoy any opportunity to break all the rules!" he smiles, before adding, "Letting players punch each other in the face was a way to offer a wicked and satisfying surprise to the gameplay. The fact that our near-sighted referee never called a foul made it better! For me, the fun of any game is diminished when people start taking it too seriously, and professional sports are perfect example of how 'too many rules' can slow down the game and distract from the real fun."

As well as the violence, another innovative feature of *Arch Rivals* was that it could be tailored by the arcade operator to suit the local audience, allowing people to cheer on their home team. Jeff explains more about this clever hook. "We put a feature called Hometown Heroes in the game's settings so the operator could set the names and colours of the four available teams," he says. "Brian had engaged a similar marketing ploy in *Rampage*, sending targeted flyers to the cities you destroyed, which got us a lot of good publicity. As we weren't allowed to officially use NBA team names or colours, I wanted people to be able to identify with any team they wanted. Being from a small town myself, players from the neighbouring towns were always our 'arch rivals', so we wanted to let the operator select the local team names and colours to boost interest from the local kids in the arcade." Brian adds another interesting anecdote: "We actually provided their local papers with possible feature stories about a new arcade game that includes a local component. For example: 'So-and-so high school featured in a hot new videogame!' This got us some great publicity." The popularity of *Arch Rivals*, no doubt helped by this campaign, also saw it chosen to become part of a new American TV series called *Video Power*. This program was basically an all-round gaming TV show very much in the vein of *GamesMaster*, but also featured a series of animated shorts that included characters from popular videogames of the time. Tyrone from *Arch Rivals* was one of those selected. The show was produced in association with Acclaim, which at that time held the licence for the home console versions of many of Midway's most popular games. *Video Power* also included characters from popular games such as *Narc*, ▶



» [Arcade] True to the game's namesake, rivalries between the teams were played up.

BECOME THE ULTIMATE RIVAL!

THREE POINTS FOR A WIN



■ Mastering three-point shots is vital. It allows you to accumulate a winning score quick and requires less running around. There are so-called 'sweet spots' on the court where you can perform these more accurately.

BLOCK AROUND THE CLOCK



■ If you are going to win in *Arch Rivals* then you need to work on your blocking skills. Timing is everything here; you need to jump just after the opponent takes his shot so you can knock the ball out of the air and, with a bit of luck, into the hands of your teammate.

BOXING CLEVER



■ The one thing that elevated *Arch Rivals* was the ability to fight your opponents! A well-placed punch not just knocks your rival to the floor for a few seconds, but also gives you possession of the ball and a chance to take the initiative.

DON'T SLIP UP



■ One thing that you have to watch out for in is the trash that the fervent crowd throw onto the court. Half-empty boxes of popcorn, cold coffee and hairy hotdogs will find their way into your path leaving you to slip, fall and look very silly in the process.

IT'S A STEAL



■ For those you who don't like to resort to violence, a button combo can activate a steal, letting you grab the ball from your opponent's hands. This might be a far more legal way to gain possession but it's not nearly as much fun.

POLE POSITION



■ Because you control the same player, it's possible to position yourself where you like when you don't have the ball. Most importantly you can 'goal hang' off the screen on the other side of the court waiting for a long range pass from your teammate.

Q&A: JULIAN SCOTT

The programmer of the Mega Drive version of Arch Rivals enters the court and schools us on conversions

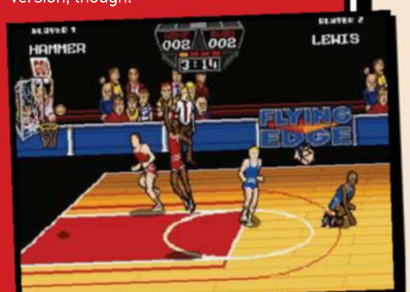


How did you come to work on the Mega Drive version of *Arch Rivals*?
I was in my first proper programming job, at Arc Developments in Walsall. It was my second game, after *Predator II* on the ST and Amiga. This was the first time the company had done any Genesis work, so a dodgily translated manual landed on my desk, and I was told to get on with it.

What issues did you have converting *Arch Rivals* to the Mega Drive?
We grabbed the graphics data from the arcade ROMS, and had to reverse engineer their storage format, which was fun, and took a lot of trial and error. Other than that, it was down to playing the arcade game as much as possible and working out the AI. I think this was a three-or-four-month project, so although not massively rushed, we couldn't spend a lot of time worrying about the quality. It just had to meet the release date.

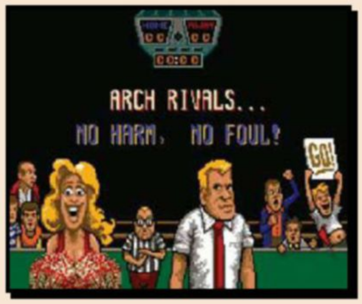
Why were there only a few versions for home systems?
I was aware of the NES version (I think we also used it as a reference), but no others. We just did the work, and moved on to the next thing. I probably assumed there were lots of other versions around, but we never checked.

Is there anything you'd change about the conversion?
Yes, those damn fades between screens. I thought they were nice at the time, but they are *so* slow, argh! I think we got pretty much everything in the game which was in the arcade version, though.



▶ *Wizards & Warriors* and *Big Foot*. Brian got a real buzz out of seeing his creation on TV. "Although I had nothing at all to do with making it, I got a big kick out of seeing it," he smiles. "Like when I learned that The Rock would be making a movie about *Rampage*!" Jeff was also pleased, but for a more personal reason. "I loved that they chose Tyrone, because he was named after my nephew!"

Even with the many innovations of *Arch Rivals*, the design team wanted to implement more, but pressure from Midway to get the game to market was too much. Jeff tells us more about what he had planned: "I only had five weeks to put in the AI into the game and so there was very little time to tune the game. In the player character descriptions all the players had different skills. The intent was for those skills to be in the game but they never got in there, each player ended up with the same abilities. The physics of setting a pick and the intelligence of the computer player using smart help defence would have made this game even better, too." The guys were not helped by internal problems at Bally/Midway, too, as Jeff explains, "We were forced to release the game earlier than intended because Midway's biggest competitor, Williams Electronics, bought Bally/Midway about halfway through the development cycle. Fortunately, we were the only two videogame designers that survived the buyout. But, unfortunately, the release date for *Arch Rivals* was pushed up dramatically by the new owners, so we couldn't do everything that we'd hope to do. I think we squeezed a whole lot of fun into a dramatically compressed timeframe, however." Brian is also keen to offer up some thoughts on the other challenges they faced during development: "While it mostly went quite smoothly, as Jeff and I were a pretty well-oiled design and development machine at that point, the biggest challenge we faced was a technical achievement that nobody really notices! The gameplay that appears to scroll back and forth across the basketball court was achieved on completely non-scrolling hardware! If you look closely, you'll note that the 'background' never moves; the illusion of movement was created by the fans in the stands sliding left and right across the bleachers together with a few goal



» [Arcade] The game's cartoonish design and comical content made it stand out.

CONVERSION CAPERS



MEGA DRIVE
1992

■ What should have been a near-arcade perfect conversion suffers in key several areas. Mainly, it's far too easy to beat your opponents, the computer AI is weak and you can score three point shots from pretty much anywhere on the court. Still, the graphics and sound are both pretty decent.



NES
1990

■ Programmed by Rare, this NES port is pretty impressive all-round. Aside from a small amount of flicker, the graphics are excellent, there are great renditions of all the original music and the gameplay is spot-on. The only notable omission here is the digitised speech.



GAME GEAR
1992

■ Another good port of the game, this portable version is remarkably close to the 16-bit Mega Drive version in the graphics department and also sports some great music, too. It's just a shame the game doesn't have any sound effects as that would have sealed the deal.



» [Arcade] This is no time to be taking a rest, even if you are winning!



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

RAMPAGE
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1986

XENOPHOBE (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1987

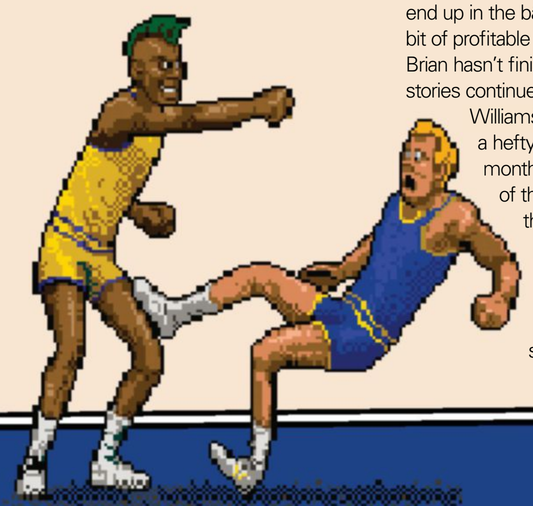
GENERAL CHAOS
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1994

lines that had to be redrawn and replaced one background block at a time! Getting more out of a system than others considered possible was always a huge motivator for me as a designer."

For a game filled with comedy, there must be some interesting stories from its production? Brian is quick to offer a great anecdote. "One of my favourite stories has to do with a simple, but incredibly effective, approach we devised to maximise arcade earnings," he says. "The arcade game was time-based, where players got a certain amount of time per quarter. However, once the timer ran out we did not end the game. Instead, Jeff waited until the ball was on its way to the basket and then stopped it and asked if the player wanted continue! Invariably, Players scrambled to grab another quarter to see if the ball was going to end up in the basket. It was a brilliant bit of profitable player psychology!" Brian hasn't finished though, and the stories continue coming. "As you know, Williams bought Midway for a hefty sum of cash a few months prior to the completion of the game. I've been told that Williams recouped the money they spent from buying the company on *Arch Rivals* arcade sales alone!" It certainly sounds like both Brian and Jeff are very proud of their creation. Thankfully, the arcade audiences enjoyed playing the game just as much as the team enjoyed making it. Brian is quick to pick up on this point, "I'm extremely proud of *Arch Rivals*! I feel we raised the bar on what a two-player game should be and basically invented a gameplay mechanic that would inspire an entire genre of games. When it comes to head-to-head arcade games, *Arch Rivals* is my second-favourite game ever! The first being our very next game: *Pigskin 621 A.D.*. This was a no-rules rugby contest which let players control an entire team of sword-wielding ruffians." Jeff shares similar thoughts, "I have many favourite games, but this one ranks up there pretty high. I wish we would have had more time to finish the game, but I'm very happy with the way it turned out."

Before we let them go we just had to ask our interviewees about *NBA Jam*, Mark Turmell's follow-up. "I don't recall talking with Mark specifically about *Arch Rivals*," Brian says. "Although I have heard from other Williams/Midway designers that he was a huge fan of the game and it inspired him." Jeff has an even more interesting story, however: "We had an option of doing a four-player *Arch-Rivals*. But turned it down because we did not want to do a sequel at that time, this was a mistake on our part as *NBA Jam* proved!" ✱

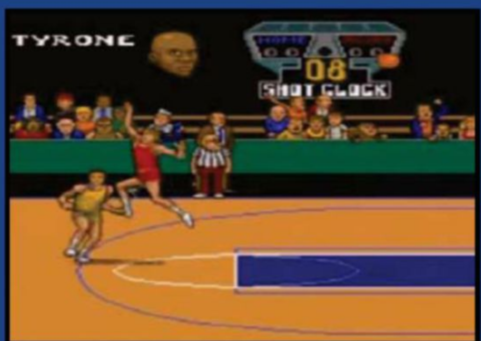
Many thanks to Brian Colin and Jeff Nauman for their time.





PS2/GAMECUBE/XBOX/PC
2004

■ Included as part of *Midway Arcade Treasures 2*, this version is emulated so, as you would expect, it is pretty much arcade perfect. Our only minor grumble is that the sound is a little bit distorted, but this is a common complaint when playing arcade games in MAME, too.



SONY PSP
2005

■ The second portable version of the game here, the PSP version of *Arch Rivals* was included in the *Midway Arcade Treasures: Extended Play* compilation. Unfortunately, the developers chose to stretch the screen horizontally, rather than keeping to the original ratio making it look squashed.



XBOX 360/PS3
2012

■ The best version of *Arch Rivals* outside of the arcades, this can be found on the *Midway Arcade Origins* collection, which is also backwards compatible with Xbox One. The sound emulation is better than previous efforts and a nice border surrounds the edges of the screen.



Shanghai

WHO NEEDS FRIENDS WHEN YOU'VE GOT PUZZLES?

» ATARI LYNX » 1990 » ATARI CORPORATION

If popularity was based on the amount of people who had the same console as you, then I spent the early part of the mid-Nineties completely friendless. Whereas all my friends opted for the more portable and battery-friendly Game Boy, I decided that I needed to own Atari's Lynx. Blinded by its power and the sheer number of great arcade games it offered, I gleefully snapped up as many games as I could, my love of the machine diminishing over time as it became increasingly more obvious that (from a software point at least) I'd backed the wrong horse.

For all the great arcade conversions that Atari's console offered, it was actually a port of *Shanghai* that ended up becoming one of my favourite games for the system. It's essentially nothing more than a tile-matching game with the aim of clearing each set of tiles that have been configured in ever more elaborate patterns. It was incredibly simple, but I couldn't get enough of it and I found myself succumbing to its charms whenever I caught the bus to my Nan's house or wanted to while away a dull lunch hour at work (don't worry, I used the company's power to save my poor batteries).

As much as I enjoyed playing *Shanghai,* it was the multiplayer games that I wanted to experience. There were three different ways to play: alternating competitive, simultaneous competitive and cooperative that saw you both working together to clear the tiles, but as I never knew anyone with a Lynx I never got to experience it. It wasn't until 1992, three years after I first purchased the console, that I finally met someone who had also gambled on Atari's system. After discussing the quality of David Fincher's *Alien 3* whilst playing *California Games*, I rummaged through my Lynx bag for my copy of *Shanghai,* eager to finally experience some two-player tile displacement. "Why'd I have a copy of that? It's shit," they replied. 25 years on and I still haven't experienced *Shanghai*'s two-player mode. And as I no longer own the console, I probably never will. *



HONEY, I SHRUNK THE SNES

After the success of the NES Mini it was inevitable that Nintendo would produce a follow-up. Nick Thorpe guides you through the 16-bit marvel's roster of games...



5+1 PAGES PRE-INSTALLED

YOSHI'S ISLAND

WORLD'S BEST BABYSITTING JOB

NINTENDO, 1995

It's been said that the hand-drawn style of *Yoshi's Island* was Shigeru Miyamoto's artistic counterpoint to the prerendered gloss of *Donkey Kong Country*. It was a bold artistic choice that paid off and *Yoshi's Island* hasn't aged a day. *Yoshi's Island* is a damned fine platformer, featuring the kind of inventive level design that separates the *Mario* series from run-of-the-mill fare. There aren't many times we'll drop everything to carry around a temperamental baby, but *Yoshi's Island* is good enough to convince us that the delivering of the stork's lost cargo is a worthwhile endeavour.





STREET FIGHTER II TURBO

SPEED AND POWER

CAPCOM, 1993

Hits didn't come much bigger than *Street Fighter II* in the early Nineties, and this fast-paced revision of Capcom's one-on-one fighter is a nostalgic favourite. As compared to the original, *Turbo* features faster gameplay, new moves for most characters and the ability to play as the four boss characters. Interestingly, the Japanese version of the console features *Super Street Fighter II* instead of this version, but let's be honest – how many of us are *really* going to miss Dee Jay? We'll trade him for a faster game any day.

F-ZERO

YOU GOT BOOST POWER!

NINTENDO, 1990

The Nintendo Classic Mini: SNES wouldn't be complete without the first great display of Mode 7. *F-Zero*'s use of a scaling and rotating graphic layer to create race tracks was astonishing, allowing for smooth turns and high speeds that were completely incredible back in the early Nineties. However, it doesn't just demonstrate the console's signature graphical trick – *F-Zero* remains a challenging racing game with an excellent handling model and peerless track design. Play through it, fall in love all over again, and then weep when you remember that Nintendo hasn't made a new *F-Zero* in an astonishing 13 years.



KIRBY SUPER STAR

A CONSTELLATION OF MINIGAMES



Kirby's finest hour saw the pink puffball starring in nine games on the same cartridge…

HAL LABORATORY, 1996



◀ **SPRING BREEZE**

■ HAL decided to simplify the Game Boy's *Kirby's Dream Land* and remake it for the SNES, and Spring Breeze is the result.



◀ **THE GREAT CAVE OFFENSIVE**

■ This adventure casts Kirby as an explorer searching for hidden treasures, trying to claim the maximum score.



◀ **MILKY WAY WISHES**

■ The largest game in the collection modifies Kirby's normal copy ability and tasks him with stopping solar warfare.

DYNA BLADE ▶

■ The gigantic bird Dyna Blade is attacking crops – help Kirby stop this menace in a four-level platform game.



MEGATON PUNCH ▶

■ Focus up, time your punch, and unleash a force so powerful that it cracks the very planet you're standing on.



THE ARENA ▶

■ It's a boss rush where endurance is the key to success. Pick a power and trash over 20 enemies.





◀ **GOURMET RACE**

■ Kirby and King Dedede face off in a race to eat as much food as possible, with the victor being the highest scorer.



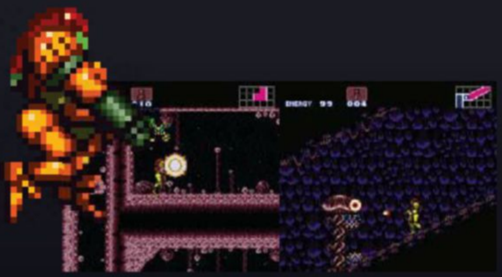
◀ **REVENGE OF META KNIGHT**

■ This dramatic platform game gives Kirby the task of destroying Meta Knight's ship in order to save Dream Land.



◀ **SAMURAI KIRBY**

■ This mode is a samurai duel, in which finely honed reflexes are required to best a variety of Kirby's usual foes.



SUPER METROID



A RIDLEY GOOD TIME

NINTENDO/INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS, 1994

Here's a game that just seems to get better with age. Nintendo has tried to top it with the likes of *Metroid Fusion* and *Zero Mission*, it has changed focus with the *Metroid Prime* series and even done a bizarre spin-off with *Federation Force*. However, nothing compares to the magic of this 16-bit outing, and that's why it's one of the most loved SNES games. The key is the use of a large, seemingly open map which encourages exploration. Samus is alone in the world, and that's emphasised with dark environments that contrast with Samus' bright Power Suit, as well as some very downbeat musical backing. Play it again and you'll realise why you missed it so much.

FINAL FANTASY VI

SON OF A SUBMARINER!

SQUARESOFT, 1994

This JRPG predates the series' rise to international hit status, but it's a favourite amongst genre aficionados. It's a justifiable choice, too. Not only does *Final Fantasy VI* boast some lovely visuals by the standards of SNES RPGs, it features one of the most memorable plots in the genre thanks to the presence of the iconic villain Kefka Palazzo, a sociopath with a penchant for snappy one-liners. Due to the use of an unaltered ROM image of the American translation, this game is being referred to as *Final Fantasy III* for the SNES Mini, reviving a confusing naming convention that was dropped with the release of *Final Fantasy VII* 20 years ago.





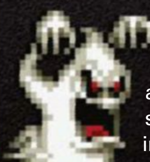
SUPER GHOULS 'N GHOSTS



I'VE DIED A MILLION TIMES

CAPCOM, 1991

If you're anything like us, you're probably sick of hearing about how *Dark Souls* is the benchmark for difficulty in videogames. The truth is that games were never afraid to give you a good kicking, and *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts* is ample proof of that. Capcom's classic platform game is actually slightly easier than its arcade predecessors, though by the same token ricin is slightly less toxic than VX – in all cases, there's an extremely high chance of death. The same horror-themed beasts are there to be slain, and you'll still have to beat the game twice in order to actually see the ending.



EARTHBOUND

10 ESSENTIAL EARTHBOUND FACTS

APE / HAL LABORATORY, 1994

***Earthbound* is one of those games that you're much more likely to have heard about than actually played, due to its prohibitively high price and lack of a PAL release.** That's a shame, because it's a cult classic that mixes an innovative mechanical take on the Japanese RPG with offbeat characters and settings. Here's what you need to know.



MAD VALUE

■ The original American SNES release of *Earthbound* sells for a going rate of over £100 unboxed, so this is great value.

MAD MONEY

■ Despite a $2 million marketing campaign, the original release sold poorly due to simple visuals and a $69.95 price tag.

UNCANNY VALLEY

■ Forget swords and sorcery – *Earthbound* is set in an odd caricature of modern America known as Eagleland.

KILLER COFFEE

■ Your enemies include abstract art, sentient vomit, hippies, and even scalding hot cups of coffee.

SECOND WIND

■ Your characters' health totals 'roll' down to zero when attacked, giving you a chance to save them from death.

NIGHTMARE FUEL

■ The game is known for having one of the most disturbing boss battles ever to appear on a Nintendo platform.

IT IS YOUR NESSTINY

■ Protagonist Ness starts his quest after learning from an alien insect that he's destined to save the world.

PURELY COINCIDENTAL

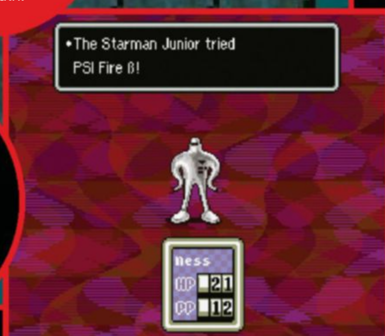
■ *Earthbound* crams in many pop culture references, including The Beatles and Monty Python.

FANTASTIC VOYAGE

■ At one point in the game, you actually venture through a living dungeon that used to be a man.

ARGH, MY EYES!

■ Some of the game's flashing battle effects were toned down in the Virtual Console release, and may be here, too.



MEGA MAN X

MASTER BLASTERS



CAPCOM, 1991



The *Mega Man X* series signalled a break with the traditions of the past, dropping the old series for a new look, brand-new characters like Zero, and the ability to wall jump. It didn't drop the non-linear structure though, and those Robot Masters are as fearsome as ever. Here are the ones you'll take on in this game:



ARMORED ARMADILLO

■ This miner takes orders from any commander, and follows Sigma into battle. As you might expect, his attack involves curling into a ball and rolling.



FLAME MAMMOTH

■ This Reploid sides with Sigma purely to increase his power. He spits oil and can cause paralysing tremors.

CHILL PENGUIN

■ This slippery customer was bored in the South Pole and joined the Reploid rebellion. He's fond of sliding around, shooting ice balls and creating ice sculptures.



STORM EAGLE

■ This brave Reploid tried to stop Sigma's rebellion, but was defeated and forced into compliance. Watch out for his lightning quick diving attacks.





STING CHAMELEON

■ This master of disguise will camouflage himself in order to sneak up to our hero and hit him. Use the Boomerang Cutter to take him down.



SPARK MANDRILL

■ This electricity-loving fiend is none too bright, and a direct subordinate of baddie Sigma. Grab the Shotgun Ice from Chill Penguin to make a monkey out of him.

BOOMER KUWANGER

■ This rational boomerang master went maverick because it seemed logical. He also sounds like someone Bart Simpson would call at Moe's Tavern.



LAUNCH OCTOPUS

■ This genius joins Sigma to employ his amazing military strategies. He fires homing torpedoes, and can drag our hero into an energy-draining whirlpool.



SECRET OF MANA

THE CO-OP QUEST

SQUARESOFT, 1993

What sets *Secret Of Mana* apart from the other RPGs the Nintendo Classic Mini: SNES? One thing: multiplayer. It plays more like *Zelda* than the other RPGs on the package, with real-time combat that occasionally pauses rather than a menu-driven turn-based system. Don't ignore this game, even if you're not normally a fan of Squaresoft – it's a beautiful and very different kind of game from the studio.





CONTRA III: THE ALIEN WARS

THE TWO MAN ARMY

KONAMI, 1992

One of the SNES's weaknesses was a slow CPU, but you'd never know it to look at this run-and-gun. From beginning to end, the game is filled with crazy explosions, huge bosses and enough firepower to keep a dictator amused. Moving to 16-bit hardware let Konami push the boundaries, with elaborate level designs and brand-new elements, like tanks. You can even bring a friend along to help with the carnage.

NO INTRODUCTION NECESSARY

These mega hits sold over 46 million copies combined, so we'd imagine you're pretty familiar with them…

SUPER MARIO WORLD

NINTENDO, 1990

■ According to our readers, Mario's first 16-bit adventure is the best game ever made. Beyond the secret-filled map and introduction of Yoshi as a companion, this game is best known for having sublime level design that makes finding all 96 level exits an enjoyable task.



DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

RARE, 1994



■ Prerendered 3D graphics might not have the same impact they did in the Nineties, but good game design is timeless. Luckily, *Donkey Kong Country* possesses this in spades, and as an added bonus it supports the second controller with a co-op mode.

SUPER MARIO KART

NINTENDO, 1992

■ You know the drill – select a *Mario*-themed track to race on, slide around corners, swear as you're taken out by a red shell just before the finish line. This Mode 7 racing game is a split-screen classic which justifies the inclusion of a second controller all by itself.



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST

NINTENDO, 1986



■ The action-RPG classic returns in all its glory, with Link venturing between the light and dark worlds to save Zelda. The real-time combat ensures that it still offers something a little different to the likes of *Earthbound*, *Final Fantasy VI* and *Super Mario RPG*.

STAR FOX

NINTENDO/ARGONAUT, 1993

■ When Nintendo and Argonaut got together to make a 3D arcade shooter, the results were magical – in no small part thanks to the power of the SuperFX chip. The sequel is the more exciting game here, but don't sleep on the original as it's still a lot of fun.



SUPER PUNCH-OUT!!

THE NEW CONTENDERS

NINTENDO, 1994

***Super Punch-Out!!* is an excellent entry in the series that closely mimics its arcade forebears rather than its NES predecessor.** With enormous sprites and a driving soundtrack, this boxing game shows off the SNES at its finest. Here are the fighters you'll need to take down in your quest to win the World Video Boxing Association heavyweight championship…



GABBY JAY This 56-year-old fighter wants to add a second win to his 1-99 record. He won't get it from us – he's softer than marshmallow.



BEAR HUGGER You'd better learn how to dodge, because this Canadian lumberjack is powerful. Counterpunching is crucial.



PISTON HURRICANE Like his Japanese cousin Piston Honda, he's powerful but fragile. Watch out for his patented 'Piston Rush' combo.



BALD BULL The iconic Turkish fighter is back for another fight, and his 'Bull Rush' attack is as deadly as ever – a one-hit KO!



BOB CHARLIE Your first Major Circuit opponent is a reggae fanatic from Jamaica. His 'Shuck And Jive' uppercut is a killer.



DRAGON CHAN Delivering highly illegal and incredibly deadly jumping kicks is the favoured tactic of this Hong Kong native.



MASKED MUSCLE Spitting in your eyes and headbutting you? Dirty wrestling tactics are this Mexican fighter's bread and butter.



MR SANDMAN Even if the 'Midnight Sleeper' doesn't get you, this formidable fighter can put you to sleep in a flash.



ARAN RYAN Dublin's favourite fighter is a hot-tempered gent who is prone to holding, as well as leaving the ring.



HEIKE KAGERO This kabuki actor doesn't look like he's 19 years old. He doesn't look like he could floor you either, but he can.



MAD CLOWN If you didn't suffer from coulrophobia before, a fight with this former opera singer will give it to you.



SUPER MACHO MAN This silver-haired Adonis isn't as tough as he was on the NES, but will still knock you out for fun.



NARCIS PRINCE An incredibly vain fighter from London, whose blocks and dodges all serve to protect his pristine face.



HOY QUARLOW Come on now – even if he is an elderly gentleman, who let him bring a big stick to a boxing match?



RICK BRUISER Watch out when this monstrous fighter jumps – the rumble will stop you moving, allowing a devastating follow-up.



NICK BRUISER Can you topple the champion's undefeated 42-0 record? Probably not, but have fun trying!

KIRBY'S DREAM COURSE

HIPSTER'S CHOICE



HAL LABORATORY, 1994

If there was a prize for the weirdest inclusion on the Nintendo Classic Mini: SNES, *Kirby's Dream Course* would unquestionably be the game to win it. This isometric crazy golf game tasks you with knocking Kirby around unusual and occasionally deadly courses, with the hole only revealed once you've cleared out the enemies. It's not a bad game, but the fiddly ball physics can render it frustrating, and it's probably the weakest game in the lineup as a result. We can only assume it was included in order to get an extra two-player game in the package and inject some diversity into a roster heavy on platform games and RPGs.





SUPER CASTLEVANIA IV

COOL WHIP

KONAMI, 1991

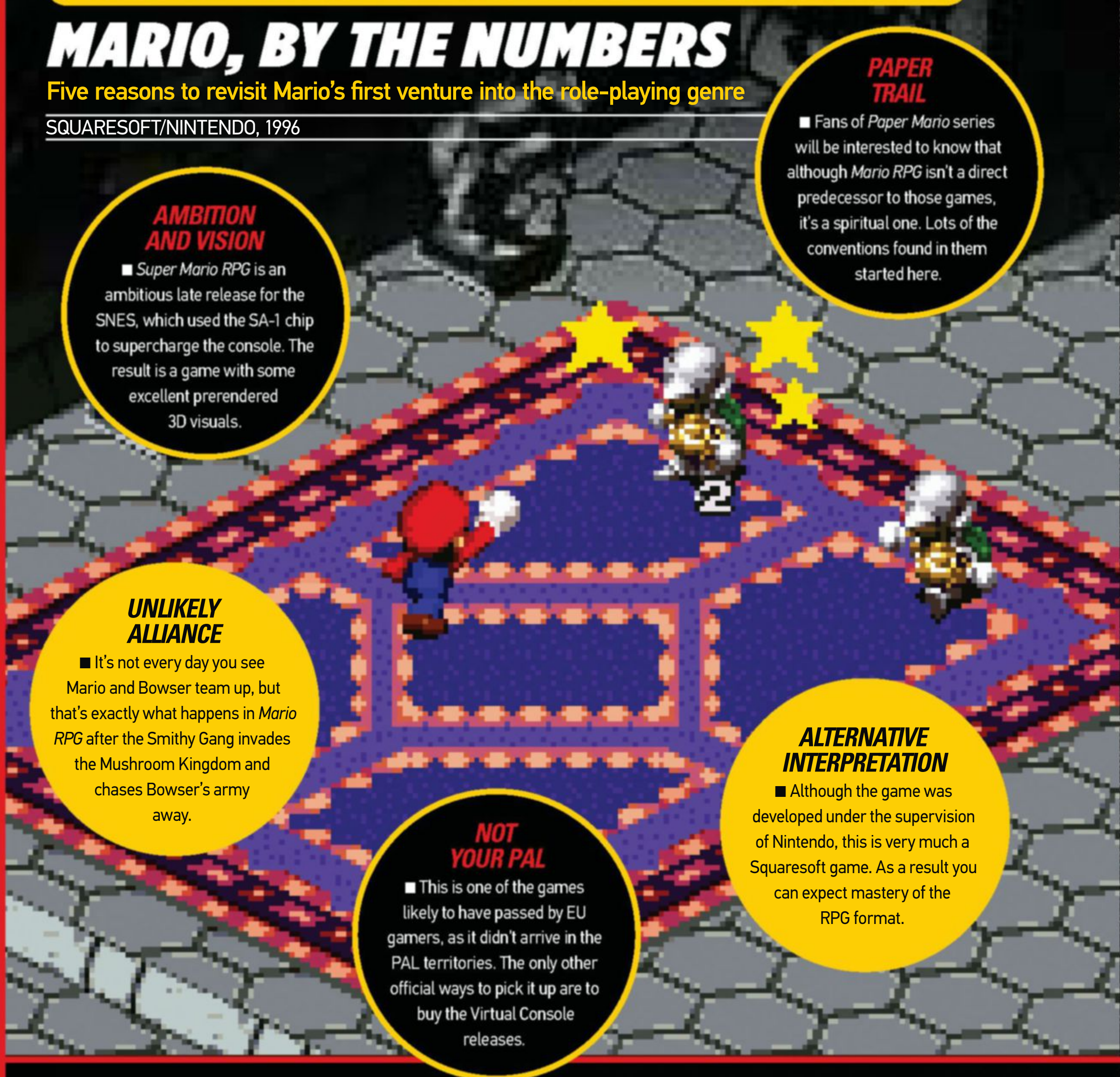
This excellent platformer is a surprising omission from the Japanese line-up for this system, so count yourself lucky that you're getting another chance to hack the undead to bits. The game's friendlier than its predecessors and takes full advantage of the power of the SNES – there's one Mode 7 moment, a tubular tunnel, which is still impressive today. We're pleased to see this one make the cut – while some may have wanted *Vampire's Kiss* as it's harder to get, this is definitely the better game of the two.

SUPER MARIO RPG: LEGEND OF THE SEVEN STARS

MARIO, BY THE NUMBERS

Five reasons to revisit Mario's first venture into the role-playing genre

SQUARESOFT/NINTENDO, 1996



PAPER TRAIL

■ Fans of *Paper Mario* series will be interested to know that although *Mario RPG* isn't a direct predecessor to those games, it's a spiritual one. Lots of the conventions found in them started here.

AMBITION AND VISION

■ *Super Mario RPG* is an ambitious late release for the SNES, which used the SA-1 chip to supercharge the console. The result is a game with some excellent prerendered 3D visuals.

UNLIKELY ALLIANCE

■ It's not every day you see Mario and Bowser team up, but that's exactly what happens in *Mario RPG* after the Smithy Gang invades the Mushroom Kingdom and chases Bowser's army away.

ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATION

■ Although the game was developed under the supervision of Nintendo, this is very much a Squaresoft game. As a result you can expect mastery of the RPG format.

NOT YOUR PAL

■ This is one of the games likely to have passed by EU gamers, as it didn't arrive in the PAL territories. The only other official ways to pick it up are to buy the Virtual Console releases.

STAR FOX 2

THE FORGOTTEN MISSION

NINTENDO/ARGONAUT, 1995/2017



Many of the players who are lucky enough to have gotten through the preorder carnage and start up their brand-new plug-and-play SNES – perhaps even the majority of players – are going to start *Star Fox* immediately, complete the first level and instantly head straight back to the SNES Mini's main menu. 'Why?' You ask. Because that's exactly how you unlock *Star Fox 2*, which is the only 'hidden' game on the device.

Star Fox 2 was famously announced by Nintendo but ultimately cancelled upon completion, and as a result sat dormant in the company's archives for over 20 years. Although prototype versions of the game have leaked over the years, the final version has never been seen by the public. Well, until now. Nintendo has decided that the time is right to resurrect the game, providing the Nintendo Classic Mini: SNES with a completely unique selling point that could even tempt existing owners of mighty SNES collections to part with their cash.

Like the original game, *Star Fox 2* is a space shoot-'em-up which utilises the SuperFX enhancement chip to display 3D graphics that the SNES couldn't manage on its own. This time around, however, the game design is less linear, allowing players to freely choose where they engage the enemy. And much like the more recent *Star Fox* games, The Arwing is also not the only playable vehicle, as players get to use a walker on planet surfaces.



If you're a big fan of the *Star Fox* series, you'll most definitely have a lot of fun spotting the bits and pieces that later made it into games like *Star Fox 64* and *Star Fox Command*. For the rest of us, it's a fun piece of history that joins *Earthbound: Beginnings* as a welcome example of Nintendo's approach to releasing its previously unreleased, yet unforgotten, games.



Q&A: DYLAN CUTHBERT

The former Argonaut coder discusses this long-overdue sequel

***Star Fox 2* was finished in the mid-Nineties – why wasn't it released then?**

The PlayStation and Saturn had just come out and we just couldn't compete with them for framerate and quality. Nintendo made a strategic decision to delay their 3D releases until the Nintendo 64 was ready.

What was your reaction when you found out that players would finally get to play the game?

I was over the moon!

What can fans of the original *Star Fox* look forward to in the sequel?

A lot more strategy and a clever encounter system, along with some full-3D roaming and platforming.

Did the team's extra experience with the SuperFX chip allow for any technical improvements over the original?

Yes, I rewrote massive swathes of the original's system to allow more parallel processing. Also the chip is twice the speed, so that helped also.

How does the final version differ from the leaked versions that exist online?

Well it's been through the extensive quality assurance and game balancing process, has no debug info on the screen and is a thoroughly complete experience.



THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home

SPIDER-MAN: THE VIDEOGAME

DEVELOPER: **SEGA** YEAR: **1991** GENRE: **BEAT-'EM-UP**

■ It's amazing to think that this superhero outing doesn't draw too much attention these days, because it has all the key things that should make an arcade game stand out – a concept that's easily grasped, variety, name recognition and, of course, some outstanding graphics.

Spider-Man: The Videogame is a beat-'em-up for up to four players which allows you to take control of Black Cat, Hawkeye, Sub-Mariner or ol' Spidey himself as they battle a variety of enemies in their quest to stop Kingpin and Doctor Doom. Each of them can use a special attack if they sacrifice a little bit of health, and this can often be worthwhile – *Spider-Man*'s web swing will take down a whole bunch of enemies in one go, potentially saving on hits. There's a decent amount of enemy variety, from simple masked mooks to trickier characters that will perform low attacks, and along the way, you'll encounter bosses including Venom, Sandman and the Green Goblin.

If that was all there was to *Spider-Man*, it'd be a pretty good game, but it actually has a major trick up its sleeve. As one of the earliest games to use Sega's powerful System 32 board, *Spider-Man* frequently uses the sprite scaling technology at its disposal to shrink everything down for a switch in game modes. Once everything has been zoomed out, our heroes move into a standard platform game format, trading fisticuffs for long-range attacks. In this mode, you'll enjoy a chase up a high-rise building, battle atop an airship and much more.

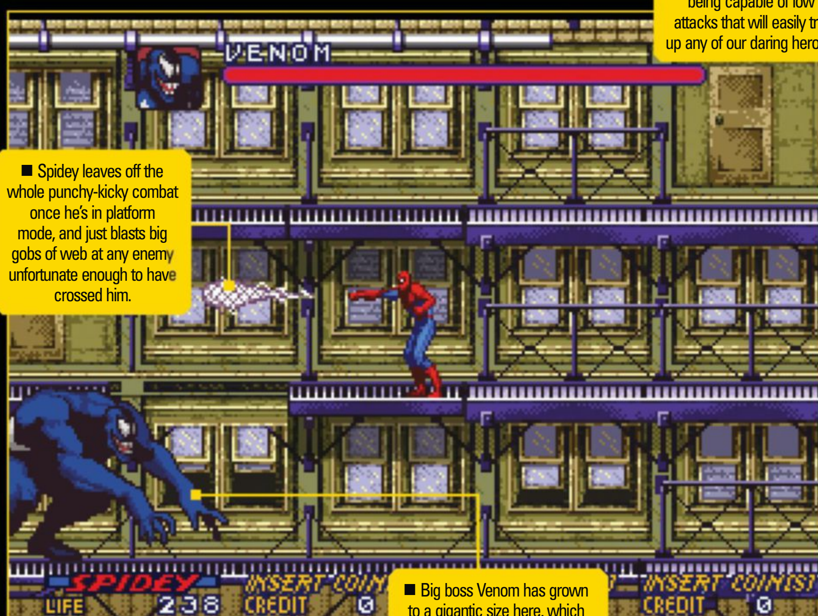
The game is a joy to look at as well as play. The System 32 hardware allows for detailed sprites and backgrounds that perfectly capture the feel of a comic book, and there are excellent little touches that add to that, including onomatopoeic effects when enemies get hit and speech bubble dialogue.

We can understand why this didn't hit the home consoles. Rather than produce an ambitious and ultimately disappointing Mega Drive conversion of this game, Sega sensibly opted to make *Spider-Man Versus The Kingpin* instead. Unfortunately, Sega didn't hold the *Spider-Man* licence for a long time, so by the time the Saturn could do justice to the arcade original, Acclaim was pushing out the likes of *Maximum Carnage*.



■ Speech bubbles are used throughout the game to signify good hits, as well as allowing dialogue from enemies. There's some audible speech too, but it's sparse.

■ These streetwise youths are more dangerous than the regular masked goons, being capable of low attacks that will easily trip up any of our daring heroes.



■ Spidey leaves off the whole punchy-kicky combat once he's in platform mode, and just blasts big gobs of web at any enemy unfortunate enough to have crossed him.

■ Big boss Venom has grown to a gigantic size here, which is why he dwarfs your friendly neighbourhood arachnid-themed superhero.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

1996

■ It doesn't have the platforming goodness of Spidey's game, but Konami's beat-'em-up is a good substitute regardless, being a comic book hero-themed game that also delivers multiplayer fun in spades. Just make sure you enjoy it as it was intended, with good friends and a healthy helping of pizza.



TOY FIGHTER

DEVELOPER: **SEGA** YEAR: **1999** GENRE: **FIGHTING**

■ This early fighting game for the NAOMI arcade board is a real oddity, and not just because it lets you take control of toys, including a superhero, a soldier and a humanoid frog. *Toy Fighter* is unusual because it throws out quite a lot of fighting game conventions. For a start, you can perform 'Dirty' attacks before the round starts. Your fighters are surrounded by a floating circular ring, which can move around the arena but serves to keep the fighters in close proximity at all times, and can even be used as a platform to perform diving attacks.

Additionally, winning fights is more about scoring points than knocking your opponent out. Reducing their health to zero is definitely viable and scores one point, but throws can score you two points (they're vulnerable to escapes and reversals, making them hard to perform) and super special attacks will score three. The first player to reach five points wins the match. This isn't the sort of fighting game you should expect to see revived for a tournament, but the unusual play style and simple controls could well endear it to players seeking alternative fighters.



» [Arcade] We're very worried by Kaeruman, and not just because he botched this throw…

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

POCKET FIGHTER

1997

■ They might not be toys, but the super-deformed *Street Fighter* and *Darkstalkers* characters in *Pocket Fighter* sure are cute. There's also an element of control simplification in the game as it uses four buttons compared to the usual six in Capcom games, which brings it in line with *Toy Fighter.*



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

COMMANDO

1985

■ In *Commando*, the setting makes a lot more sense than *Mister Viking* does, there's no forced vertical scrolling and the controls work exactly as you'd expect them to. That's probably why *Commando* was converted to every format under the sun and *Mister Viking* went directly to gaming Valhalla.



MISTER VIKING

DEVELOPER: **SEGA** YEAR: **1984**
GENRE: **SHOOT-'EM-UP**

■ We're not sure what's going on in *Mister Viking*, to be honest. You play as a little Viking chap who is attacked by a variety of creatures – some of which appear to be trolls, some of which defy sensible description. This can't stand, so you shoot them (of course!). Extra weaponry can be gained from walking into fruit-shaped houses, or picked up after it's dropped by flying longboats, and fired with the second button. Every so often you'll reach a fortified zone, where the action stops until key enemies have been cleared. Once you've reached the top of the map and blown up the skull fortress, the game loops.

While the game looks and plays a little bit like *Commando*, there are a number of differences which make *Mister Viking* less satisfying to play. For a start, although you can fire in any direction, you can only do so while moving as your Viking defaults to facing forward when standing still. Diagonal shots are possible, but they don't use a 45-degree angle so they're tricky to line up. It's not bad, but certainly not a top-tier Sega arcade game.



» [Arcade] Imagine a cute version of Capcom's *Commando* and you're on the right track.

BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

BULLET

DEVELOPER: **SEGA** YEAR: **1987** GENRE: **SHOOT-'EM-UP**

■ Sega's first twin-stick shooter wasn't exactly a big hit, and we'd imagine that the reason for that is probably because it's just a bit dull. There's not a lot that's technically wrong with the game – the controls are responsive, your character is plenty fast and there's never a shortage of enemies to shoot as you explore each stage in order to locate the big boss.

Unfortunately, there's very little variety to be found. Enemies converge on you constantly, offering no imaginative attack patterns and requiring no special tactics to defeat. Your weaponry can be upgraded by running over power-up panels, but all you gain from this is a straight shot with more power – and you have to keep passing over panels, as the power decays over time. Between a lack of arcade success and the unsuitable control systems of its home consoles at the time, we can see exactly why Sega wouldn't have bothered converting *Bullet* for the consumer market – it just becomes boring far too quickly.





introversion software

Introversion was formed in the 32-bit era of 3D games, large teams and big budgets but it proved great titles could still be made on a shoestring with the right talent. Mark Morris explains how to David Crookes



» [PC] Some players felt jumpy when they saw this screen in *Uplink*, believing the game was connecting to the internet.

Mark Morris starts clicking his mouse and tapping a few keys. "That's really old – $19 million," he says, eagerly looking for a figure that represents the current sales of *Prison Architect*, Introversion's most successful game. Initially released in 2012, *PA*, as Mark abbreviates, had $10.7 million in preorder sales for the alpha version alone. But when it was officially released on 6 October 2015, interest rocketed far beyond the developer's wildest dreams.

"Let's see… $28 million," he says, proudly, his voice lifting with noticeable joy at the amount of money amassed by a game that has players constructing and managing their own maximum security prison. "It has sold just over two million units and that's only on PC. It's absolutely insane. They're just crazy numbers." Considering Introversion was on the brink of going bust in 2010, it is also something of a gaming miracle.

Introversion has been on an eventful journey over the past couple of decades. It began in 1997 when Mark not only met Chris Delay and John Knottenbelt, two fellow students on the Computer Science course at Imperial College London, but also Electrical Engineering student Thomas Arundel who lived in the same halls of residence. Chris had gone to Imperial College London with a couple of titles that he'd worked on. "He'd been developing games since he could touch a computer," Mark says.

Over time, the friends became close and they ended up sharing a flat. Chris began to program a game called *Uplink*, based on an idea that he had when he was in Sixth Form. He envisaged it being like *Elite II*, bringing the idea of flying spaceships and visiting starports to an online world. Over time it evolved into a hacking sim. Originally proposed as a 3D title to fit in with the expected trend for such games in the now established era of the PlayStation, it was soon ditched in favour of 2D.

Uplink became a labour of love for Chris although he never believed it would make a commercial game. Intending to give it away for free, he'd note down ideas for his project whenever a thought popped into his head and he'd implement them as soon as he could. It was a fluid development process that took around 18 months before he was even confident of showing it to anybody. "Tom and I would go out, party and get drunk before heading back at 4am and Chris would still be up coding," Mark recalls. Slowly, but surely, a slick, menu-driven game began to emerge that made a progress bar seem tense as players sought to get into a computer system and out again without being caught.

Mark and Tom were impressed, and John assisted with some of the hard technical problems to help see the game to completion ("The game was 99 per cent Chris and one per cent Johnny but that one per cent was, you know, an important, one per cent," says Mark). It was at that point in 2001 that Mark spotted a new competition being run by Imperial offering £10,000 for the best business idea. The friends proposed creating a company that would ship *Uplink* and entered the contest.

"I didn't see it as an opportunity to start a business but I thought it was a competition that we could go in for and get ourselves a nice little pot of cash to pay off a bit of debt," says Mark.



» The Introversion team isn't afraid to get stuck in with publicity work. Here they are posing in full military outfits.



» [PC] *DEFCON* conjures up memories from the likes of Eighties pop culture, notably *WarGames*.

INSTANT EXPERT

- Cofounders Chris Delay, Mark Morris and Tom Arundel all met in September 1997 while studying at Imperial College London.
- **Introversion was set up at a cost of £600 – £200 from each founder.**
- The trio – plus fellow student and coder John Knottenbelt – turned to basic guerilla marketing to sell their first game, *Uplink*, by targeting various forums.
- **The team worked from home because they couldn't afford an office and held most meetings via Skype.**
- Only around 2008 did the trio have something that it could call a 'base '– a four-storey London townhouse.
- **Tom's sister, Vicky, once worked as a marketing manager for Introversion and she came up with the tagline, "The last of the bedroom programmers."**
- Chris experimented with *Darwinia* for 18 months before it became a real game.
- **Introversion's games have tended to have a lo-fi feel, inspired by old-school gaming.**
- *DEFCON* was Introversion's bestselling game before *Prison Architect* was released.
- **When *DEFCON* was available for preorder, the company was down to its last £1,500.**
- Introversion has made just seven games in 16 years, although three games are in the works: *Subversion*, *Chronometer* and *Wrong Wire*.

TIMELINE

1997 ■ Mark Morris and Chris Delay meet as students on a masters course in Computing at Imperial College London.

2000 ■ **Chris begins to write *Uplink* for the PC.**

2001 ■ Engineering student Thomas Arundel, helps sell and distribute the game which ended up getting a warm critical reception.

2002 ■ **Chris starts work at Frontier Developments, Mark joins the Ministry Of Defence and Thomas becomes an engineer, but they formally set up Introversion Software Ltd.**

■ *Uplink* starts getting favourable reviews including 80% in *PC Gamer* magazine.

2003 ■ **Chris starts writing *DEFCON*, and work begins on *Future War*.**

2004 ■ Strategy First, which had agreed to distribute *Uplink*, files for bankruptcy owing Introversion tens of thousands of pounds.

2005 ■ **Assisted by Chris' friend and coder Andy Bainbridge, *Future War* is released under its new name of *Darwinia*.**

2006 ■ Sales of *Darwinia* are initially slow but they take off following a deal with Valve which sells *DEFCON* on Steam.

2007 ■ ***DEFCON* is released in physical format in the shops in the UK and US.**

2008 ■ *Darwinia*'s follow-up, *Multiwinia*, is released and it is highly rated.

2009 ■ ***Multiwinia* sales fail to pick up.**

2010 ■ *Darwinia* and *Multiwinia* are ported to the Xbox 360 as *Darwinia+* but sales are dire.

■ **Facing closure, Introversion is saved when Steam achievements were added to *DEFCON*, leading it to be featured in a well-received sale.**

2011 ■ Introversion's games are included in a Humble Indie Bundle and sells very well.

2015 ■ ***Prison Architect* is released and goes on to generate $28 million in sales.**

2017 ■ *Scanner Sombre*, its latest game, is released.

DEFINING GAMES



UPLINK

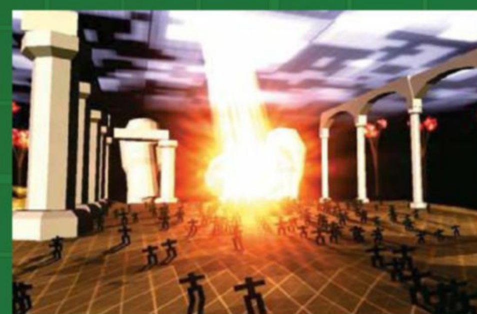
PC, 2001

■ This is the game which inspired Introversion to form and, boy, was it a debut and a half. It puts players in the shoes of a cyberhacker and asks you to break into as many systems as possible by solving a series of challenging, logical problems which become more difficult as you progress. It may not be much to look at, but that is the point. *Uplink* feels authentic as you seek to alter documents and delete files without arousing the suspicion of the authorities. As such, it gives you a good, if not disturbing, insight into the hacker's psyche.

DARWINIA

PC/XBOX 360, 2005

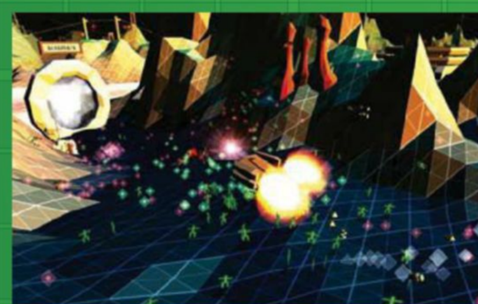
■ Introversion worked on *Darwinia* for ten years, producing various versions and picking up an Independent Games Festival award along the way. It is easy to see its appeal. Not only does this well-paced game feel retro, thanks to a graphical style that the developer admits pays homage to the likes of *Defender* and *Tron*, it has a plot right out of the Eighties, too. Yet by fusing strategy with an arcade shooter and by mixing in god-game elements and puzzles, Introversion managed to produce a highly original game which attracted a huge number of fans.



The idea didn't get into the top three, but it didn't matter. "The competition had sort of done its job," Mark continues. "We had this plan and it became a catalyst for us." The friends decided to push ahead and create the company, setting up a website and a Worldpay account to accept payments.

Mark, Tom and Chris put in £200 each which enabled them to produce a small run of units and they began to hit the forums under various names to generate some excitement. "*Uplink* ended up resonating with people and we ran a very early example of a viral campaign," says Mark. "Within about three months or so, we placed an order for about 3,000 units which was the minimum you could order from a CD plant. We were also trying to drive media coverage in the UK."

The friends identified around 20 magazines that were relevant to their game. "As well as targeting the gaming press, we felt the subject matter would be of interest to the computing press and the lifestyle press," says Mark. "We were cold calling journalists and saying, 'Look, are you interested in writing about our game?' We got some harsh knockbacks but we sent out many copies."



» [PC] *Darwinia* is a mashup of action, puzzles and strategy that was launched on 4 March 2005 to great acclaim.

Linux Format was the first magazine to give Introversion a street date for their review. "We were on a little skiing trip so as soon as we landed back in London, I rushed off to WHSmith at the airport and found the magazine," Mark adds. "They'd given us 60% or something, which I knew wasn't going to be good enough. I sort of gave up and felt the business was too fragile." Then a breakthrough came, thanks to games journalist Kieran Gillen who was the Reviews Editor on *PC Gamer*.

Kieran had received the game in the post and he'd placed it on a pile, eventually getting round to looking at it a week or so later. In his subsequent review, he recalled *Uplink* being so realistic that his Editor believed it was connecting to the internet and had pulled the cables in horror. Kieran loved it and phoned around his colleagues at Future Publishing, encouraging *PC Format, Edge* and *GamesMaster* to review it too. In a phone call with Chris, Kieran also agreed to give the fledgling videogame company some quotes. "*PC Gamer* gave us 80%," says Mark. "I felt we were really on to something."

Kieran's praise was indeed a turning point. The journalist's quotes helped the developers persuade



» Mark Morris and Tom Arundel wear tailor-made jackets with a large *Darwinia* sprite stuck on the back.



DEFCON

PC, 2006

■ This wonderful RTS makes splendid use of wireframe graphics, the likes of which you'll see if you revisit the cult 1983 movie, *WarGames*. Any pangs of nostalgia soon fall away, however, when you realise the task that lies ahead. By transporting you back to a time when thermonuclear war was a very real possibility, *DEFCON* has you causing mass global destruction while tasking you with defending your own borders. It chillingly scores you by telling you how many civilians you've just killed, making for a thought-provoking title that truly underlines the futility of war.

MULTIWINIA

PC/XBOX 360, 2008

■ This is not simply a set of multiplayer options forced into *Darwinia*. Rather, it is a reworked, lightweight version of the original and it includes six multiplayer modes – such as King Of The Hill and Capture The Statue – each of which involves completing a simple objective faster and better than your rivals. It's more quickly paced and action-packed than *Darwinia* with games taking as little as five minutes or up to half-an-hour to complete. Unfortunately, it didn't sell well, but it was released as *Darwinia+* on the Xbox 360, making it Introversion's first foray into the console market.





PRISON ARCHITECT

VARIOUS, 2015

■ As Introversion's most successful game with well in excess of a million copies sold, the brilliant construction and management simulator *Prison Architect* has all but secured the company's future. You build up a jail by adding cells, recreation rooms, offices and so on while making sure you stick to your budgets and have enough staff. You're also asked to manage inmates and make sure they are being looked after humanely. Viewed from a top-down viewpoint and using graphics that evoke memories of the 16-bit era, its design resembles games like *Dungeon Keeper*.

RETRO HOMAGE

Play *Darwinia* and you will come to know Dr Sepulveda, the fictitious computer scientist who is said to have designed a groundbreaking computer called the Protologic 68000. You'll learn that he networked them together to produce a virtual theme park inhabited by primitive AI sprites, Darwinians, which then evolved before becoming threatened by a virus. But if you find yourself doing a double take, then you're not alone.

Dr Sepulveda bears an uncanny likeness to Sir Clive Sinclair. It isn't him, of course: it's a man which the Introversion team met at a party. But the fact he so obviously looked like the creator of the Spectrum was deliberate. That's because *Darwinia* is a homage to the 8-bit retro scene: there's even a loading screen which slowly builds on the screen in the midst of a line-strew border. Despite that, 'retro' for Chris was the Commodore Amiga.



"WE GOT SOME HARSH KNOCKBACKS"

Mark Morris

distributor Pinnacle to take on the game and get it into the shops. Meanwhile, word of mouth was bringing attention to the title. "Having that *PC Gamer* article in our back pocket when we were visiting buyers and trying to convince them to carry *Uplink* was our route in," Mark continues. "HMV and most of the independent shops across the UK took it, although we didn't make a huge amount of money from retail."

While they were waiting for their venture to succeed, Chris went to work for Frontier Developments, headed by David Braben, the creator of *Elite*. Mark was employed at the Ministry Of Defence in Bristol and Thomas became an engineer. "He was only there for three months before his firm made all their graduates redundant, so Tom was an entrepreneur from the start," says Mark.

Introversion Software Limited was incorporated on 17 January 2002. It not only made the lads look more professional, it was a requirement of their retail deal. Their overheads were low since they had no office and sales continued to go up and up. There was a feeling that the future would be bright but not everything was turning to gold. "We produced a Pocket PC version of *Uplink* because we felt PDAs were new and exciting and we wanted to go where the geeks were," says Mark. "If you were a systems administrator then you'd have a Pocket PC so we thought we could broaden the market a bit. The problem was *Uplink* had never really been designed particularly well. Chris was a junior coder and the game really needed manually reworking to fit on a small screen. It just wasn't going to fly."

The game did hit the shelves in the US, though, under the name *Uplink: Hacker Elite* after Introversion struck a deal with Strategy First. "We'd agreed $50,000 for *Uplink* and, because we didn't understand how business worked, expected it to come in at the end of the month. But they filed for Chapter 11 protection and not only did we realise we wouldn't see this money, we couldn't get the rights back. We'd never even heard of this thing called Chapter 11 protection."

They then realised they were in trouble. They had been to E3 "with this mindset that they were rock stars who had made a lot of money" and they'd hired a speedboat and fast cars. They didn't realise sales were falling. It was lucky, then, that Chris had also been working on a game called *Future War* with a friend he'd met at Frontier Developments called Andrew Bainbridge. "Chris had been sitting there drumming his fingers on his desk and he said, 'Look, I've got this new game idea and I want this guy, Andy, to come and work with us.' When he started showing us the game, I was blown away."

The game had been the result of an indie jam which had taken place over the course of 40 hours. At one point, it had 100 sprites on the screen and Chris felt it would be a good idea to expand the concept and have thousands of sprites that he



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

CHRIS DELAY



■ Chris remains the lead designer and developer of all of Introversion's games and he is very much the company's auteur. His vision and gaming concepts have driven Introversion's success over the years and the decision to allow him to concentrate entirely on development has reaped rewards.

MARK MORRIS



■ Mark is the managing director of Introversion and he oversees the company's day-to-day activity. It was Mark who spotted that Imperial College London was running a business competition which led to Introversion setting up. Today, Mark acts as the company's spokesperson, deals with marketing and acts as the arbiter between Chris and Tom.

TOM ARUNDEL



■ Tom is still Introversion's financial guru and he spends his time ensuring the books are in order while looking out for sales and licensing opportunities. He is constantly on the lookout for new markets and platforms but he is also the sales director of an electronic manufacturing company called Precision Microdrives Ltd.

JOHN KNOTTENBELT



■ Although John was not involved in the university competition which led to Introversion starting, he was brought on board from the start. As a coder, he balanced the four-man team and today he is a director who manages the technical aspects of Introversion's game development as well as the company's website.

could build a game around. More than 18 months of experimentation passed with Chris having to create the graphics in the absence of a dedicated artist on the Introversion team. The blocky nature of the sprites was a result of such restrictions but it enabled Chris to replicate the insides of a computer – the premise of the game – and tap into a retro feel.

Mark says he had a lot of faith in Chris. "*Uplink* was a masterpiece in terms of creating atmosphere and tension, and evoking a response in the player with a sparse-looking game," he gushes. "But I don't think any indie game at that point had the sort of vision, scope and aspiration of this new one." The game's name was changed to *Darwinia* and it transpired that Chris had created a digital world populated by a sentient evolving life form called the Darwinians which ran inside a computer that had been built by a guy called Dr Sepulveda who didn't want the system to be overrun by a virus.

"A lot of people felt a connection with these little 2D Darwinians," Mark continues. The game took inspiration from *Cannon Fodder* as well as gaming in general from the previous decade, the Eighties. Bright lights represented an electric lifeline and there were geometric patterns which sprawled like masses of circuits. It made use of the W, A, S and D keys to move and the mouse to look, a system typical of first-person shooters as Chris believed it felt intuitive to many and preferable to the arrow keys. *Darwinia* sold 40,000 copies and won three awards at the Independent Games Festival in 2006. "It showed everyone what small teams could produce and I felt it was a bit of a game changer for indie studios," Mark says.

Introversion was on a roll even though the money had run out by the end of *Darwinia*'s development. But *Darwinia* was taken on by a relatively new digital distribution platform: Steam. "Valve approached us and we were reticent to work with them because of the revenue they'd take,"

> "CHRIS WANTED TO MAKE A GAME IN 24 HOURS"
>
> Mark Morris

Mark recalls. But Valve's back catalogue swung it and sales soared. Valve took *Uplink* too and it also sold Introversion's next game *DEFCON* which was released in 2006 and pitched players in an all-out nuclear war.

"*DEFCON* arose because Chris wanted to make a game in 24 hours," says Mark. "Back then, the TV program *24* was a big thing and he thought, 'If Jack Bauer can save the world in 24 hours, I can make a videogame in 24 hours.' He tried and failed, extended it to a week and, seven days later, had a prototype of *DEFCON*. He came to Tom and I and said, 'I want to make this game; it's small and focused'. A programmer, Gary Chambers, who had been a big fan of *Uplink* and had coded some mods for it came on board and the pair of them spent a year on the game. Johnny also came on board properly at that point and he did the multiplayer stuff for it."

The game did hugely well. In fact, the servers wilted after an hour as gamers hooked up and the cash poured in. Introversion was in a better position this time around with a black book of journalists to help promote the game, a strong reputation and an established distribution platform. Then Microsoft looked to launch Xbox Live Arcade and Introversion felt it would be a perfect way to expand into consoles. "Up to that point, we'd been investing in game ideas but only selling to a third of the market," Mark says. "Microsoft wanted *Darwinia* but they needed it to be multiplayer. This feature

THE DNA OF INTROVERSION



BEDROOM PROGRAMMERS

■ For a while, Introversion referred to itself as, "The last of the bedroom programmers." That's because it carried on the tradition of producing games with tiny teams at a time when the industry had moved into blockbuster productions with a cast of dozens if not hundreds. Even in the late Noughties, the developers worked from a four-storey townhouse in London. And, yes, it even had beds.



CHRIS DELAY

■ Introversion's not-so-secret weapon is the incredible talent of Chris Delay, the coder who got the ball rolling with *Uplink* and who has got stuck into every other Introversion game since. The reliance on Chris has arguably reduced the number of games Introversion has made over the years, but his knack of understanding what makes a game, his work ethic and nods to the past have made him invaluable.



RETRO-STYLE GAMING

■ Before paying homage to retro gaming was popular, Introversion was delving into the past for inspiration. The sprites of *Darwinia* drew on 20 years of gaming history while the latest game, *Prison Architect*, dusts off a much-loved genre and brings it bang up-to-date for modern gamers. Introversion's ferocious emphasis on gameplay over cutting edge graphics really ought to be applauded.



PERSEVERANCE THOUGH FAILURE

■ The company has gone through an up-and-down pattern of producing games that sell well and games that fall short of expectations. But while the developers have got close to shutting up shop in the past, their enduring love of games – especially indie-style titles – and their desire to keep producing them has always won out, allowing them great success today.



» [PC] *Prison Architect* has done phenomenally well and it has found it way on to consoles and smartphones.



[PC] Darwinians can be dropped into large ranked units and their firepower can be focused in a given direction.

had been dropped from the game. "So I said, let's reactivate it and get it done but, it was rubbish," says Mark. "So Chris went away and came back with what ended up being *Multiwinia* and it ended up being our next game release."

The game was more action-packed than *Darwinia* and it had lots of cool explosions as players competed against each other in one of six different modes. It was intended to be a standalone game and it was something of a masterpiece – so much so Mark and Chris went full-time and were convinced it would do well. But gamers didn't quite get it. "We had a sales ticker at the launch party, and we'd spent a fortune on servers this time, but we were selling one copy every ten minutes or so. It was bad," recoils Mark. "People who enjoyed *Darwinia* didn't want to play *Multiwinia* and those who hadn't liked *Darwinia* didn't bother with *Multiwinia* because they thought it was the sequel."

It was a shock but Introversion was still expected to create the XBLA version and it was proving to be a nightmare thanks to Microsoft's quality requirements and the need to be entirely bug-free. "We wanted to get out of it," Mark says. "Microsoft was constantly pushing us to make the game look better, redo the menus and so on. It was a huge amount of work and we built up debt buying dev kits and expanding the studio. We were doing everything on credit." The game for XBLA became *Darwinia+* and it was an updated version of *Darwinia* and *Multiwinia*. "We needed to sell 30,000 units to pay off debts but we sold 2,000 on day one and we knew we wouldn't hit the sales targets quickly enough.

It was 2010 and Introversion laid off staff, got rid of its Georgian townhouse office and began paying back its debt. Mark and Chris were looking for new jobs, and struggling, but they were consoled by the fact that income from Steam was a steady £2,000-a-month. Then the Humble Bundle came along, a new digital storefront which sold games at a price determined by the purchaser and split the proceeded between the developer and charity. "It exploded," Mark says. "We sold *Darwinia*, *DEFCON* and *Multiwinia* in November 2011 and ended up getting about £100,000 or so."

Chris then pitched *Prison Architect*, leaving behind a game called *Subversion* which he had been working on for a long time only to find it wasn't quite working. It was released as an alpha the following year but rather than go all-out, Introversion changed its strategy, telling just four journalists that it was launching. Players began to get on board and *Prison Architect* grew. Former Introversion staff came back and the team kept going, with the official launch taking place in 2015. With $28 million worth of sales, the mood at Introversion quickly turned optimistic.

Today, Introversion still looks forward, though its latest game, the first-person exploration title *Scanner Sombre* released in April this year has become "our worst-selling game to date". With the money rolling in from *Prison Architect*, however, it matters much less now. Introversion can continue to make the games that it wants to make and stick to its innovative roots. "We don't have any aspiration to grow," says Mark. "We don't have an office and we don't want one. We're eight people now and we don't want to get bigger. We just want to focus on new games and new ideas."



THE PC MARKET

■ Up until 2010, Introversion was very much a PC developer first and foremost, with its games appearing exclusively for Windows and Linux machines. That year, however, it moved into console game development with *Darwinia+* on the Xbox 360. But while it has seen its titles on iOS, Android and the Mac, the PC (and Steam) has been well and truly at Introversion's beating heart.



WORKING ON A SHOESTRING

■ For a while, the Introversion team had day jobs and worked for the developer in their own time. When its employees switched to working for Introversion full-time, they effectively ended up working hand-to-mouth, with one project often just about providing enough money to earn a decent living and fund the next game. It piled on the pressure but, to their credit, Introversion never cut corners.



» The Introversion team posing, again, in military garb.

RGT

Retro Gamer Travels

LOST IN TRANSLATION

How the rest of the world experienced your favourite games



ENDURO RACER

JPN ➔ ROW

Japan ➔ ROW

FORMAT
Master System

DEVELOPER
Sega

YEAR
1987

ORIGIN
Japan

LOCALISED FOR
Rest Of World

REASONS
Commercial

ECONOMY

■ We often see things chopped up and changed a little bit when games are localised for other audiences, and in the worst case scenario there's a significant loss of content considered too difficult or culturally inappropriate to localise. But it's certainly rare to see a game lose a significant amount of content for seemingly no reason at all, and that appears to be the case with *Enduro Racer*, an isometric racing game that bears only a thematic resemblance to its arcade cousin.

Over here, *Enduro Racer* tasks you with getting through five stages within a time limit, across a country road, ruins, a red desert, marshland and a mountain path. After each stage, you can exchange points scored by passing other racers for new parts. Once you've beaten those stages, you'll begin a second loop of the same five stages with more enemy racers added to make everything a bit tougher.

The Japanese version of *Enduro Racer* gives you the same basic task, but bumps the stage count to ten. The additional stages are a regular race track, a snowy field, a highway at night, another desert and a rocky beach. That's not all, as existing stages gain new graphical features such as spectators and a roadside hut in the country stage. The presentation is miles ahead of the Western version, too, with an improved title screen, a post-game map showing your progress, and a congratulations screen after the tenth stage.

Why is the Japanese game so much bigger and better than its Western counterpart? In this case, it's because Sega used a two-megabit ROM for the Japanese version, released in May 1987. The North American version uses a cheaper one-megabit ROM, and was likely produced in tandem with its larger Japanese counterpart as it was unveiled at the Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago the following month and released in August 1987. A release schedule in issue 73 of *Computer & Video Games* shows that a UK date of November 1987, with the same £24.95 price as other two megabit games. However, it arrived in early 1988 in the cut-down one megabit form.

But we still don't understand why the game was cut down. It can't have been in response to the Japanese version's commercial fortunes, as there would have been no time. We can only imagine that Sega wanted to reserve two megabit cartridges for special applications – the others on sale at the time were major arcade conversions, 3D games and the big film licence *Rocky*.

ENDURO RACER

Departing: 1987



» [Master System] And here's the Japanese version, with a hut and some different trees. What gives, Sega?



» [Master System] Here's the cut-down and much more sparse scenery that non-Japanese players got to enjoy.

ZETTAI ZETSUMEI TOSHI 2

JPN ➔ USA
Japan ➔ USA

ZETTAI ZETSUMEI TOSHI 2 Departing: 2006

FORMAT
PlayStation 2

DEVELOPER
Irem

YEAR
2006

ORIGIN
Japan

LOCALISED FOR
USA

REASONS
Commercial

■ You might think that the concept of being trapped in a disaster is one that is equally terrifying no matter who is involved – after all, nobody wants to be buried under a collapsed building, nor trapped as a flood isolates you from any possible escape route. For some reason, though, the localisation team behind the US release *Raw Danger* decided that the Japanese setting wasn't appropriate, and moved the action to the USA. As part of that process, the team decided to give the cast a lousy ethnic reassignment .

All of the characters were renamed, so the initial protagonist Kazuya Shinohara becomes Joshua Harwell, and his escape companion goes from being Haruka Fujimiya to Stephanie McMurrough. What's more, the inhabitants of Geo City have all been given new hair colours but their facial features haven't been altered, so they still look Japanese but also appear have been attacked by a hair bleaching fanatic.

Additionally, during Isaac Schiller's part of the game there's an area featuring small snippets of character dialogue and a minor cutscene, which was accessible in the Japanese game but is inexplicably blocked off by water in the American release.





» [PS2] Here's the Westernised Mayor Goldstein. Thankfully, his fetching yellow suit remains the same.

ECONOMY

CRASH BANDICOOT: WARPED

USA ➔ EU
USA ➔ EU

CRASH BANDICOOT: WARPED Departing: 1998

FORMAT
PlayStation

DEVELOPER
Naughty Dog

YEAR
1998

ORIGIN
USA

LOCALISED FOR
Europe

REASONS
Difficulty

■ We're sorry to tell you this, American chums, but Naughty Dog clearly believed that you were all a bit rubbish at games. It's a bold statement, but comparing the North American version of *Crash Bandicoot: Warped* to the European version reveals it to be the truth. While some of the tweaks to the PAL version of the game were minor things intended to add a bit of polish and fix bugs, many of them are clearly intended to make the game more difficult.

For a start, lots of Aku Aku mask boxes have been replaced with standard question mark boxes, taking away shields. These boxes can turn back into Aku Aku boxes, but only if you die a lot – and if you do die a lot, you'll only ever be given one Aku Aku mask to ease the challenge, as opposed to two in the original version. Then there are the enemies: quite a few were altered to perform more attacks, or faster attacks, in the European version, and the wizards were toughened up a bit to take two hits – and show off their underwear – as standard.

Interestingly, the recent *N. Sane Trilogy* remake discards these refinements in favour of the original American difficulty level.



» [PlayStation] Hey look, it's a helpful Aku Aku crate with a shield in it…

» [PlayStation] No shielding for you, old world! You'll take your hits and you'll like 'em!

ECONOMY



Super Adventure Island

DUAL DESTINIES

» SNES » PRODUCE » 1992

As a child and a diehard Sega fan, I never understood *Adventure Island,* because *Adventure Island* was just *Wonder Boy.* It seems ridiculous to say it now, but I couldn't quite get my head around why people were so intent on talking about an arcade game that had simply been renamed for those *other* consoles. It was only as I grew older and took the fanboy blinkers off that I realised that this renamed game had grown into something completely different to the *Wonder Boy* series, retaining the original arcade platform gameplay, as opposed to *Wonder Boy*'s move into exploration and action-RPG mechanics.

So it was with some excitement that I started playing *Super Adventure Island* – I'd always been a fan of *Wonder Boy In Monster Land,* but this was a sequel to *Wonder Boy* that actually played like *Wonder Boy.* I wasn't disappointed. Sure, Master Higgins doesn't have the vibrant blonde hair of his Sega-endorsed cousin Tom-Tom, but he could throw hatchets and skateboard through stages just as well as the chap on my Master System. Of course, the power of the SNES meant that he did it in rather more attractive environments, and with better music.

Since then, I've pondered the way that *Wonder Boy* and *Adventure Island* diverged. How often does one game produce two different but equally worthy sequels? I can only think of *Street Fighter,* which gave us the *Street Fighter '89* project (released as *Final Fight*) and *Street Fighter II,* and that's some fine company to keep *





Wild Guns



In an alternative universe, the West was won by battling a giant green-eyed robot from the rooftop of a saloon. Retro Gamer looks behind the scenes of the recently reloaded cult SNES shooter Wild Guns



» [SNES] The start of the ammo depot stage. There's a lot of dynamite flying about.

Those of you of a certain age may recall the old animatronic Western-themed shooting galleries found at amusement parks in the Eighties and early nineties. Packed with intricately arranged Americana, primed to react in various amusing ways when you hit them with your imaginary Winchester '73, they were so densely packed with stuff to shoot at it boggled the mind. *Wild Guns* is a bit like that, except with cyborg gunslingers instead of Uncle Zeke in his rocking chair with a jug of moonshine. Set in an alternative steampunk Wild West of neon hoardings and huge mecha bosses, it's a lightgun game without lightguns, evoking arcade shooters like *Cabal* and its semi-sequel *Blood Bros.*. Packed with impressive anime-style graphics and imaginative character and boss design, the game introduced us to grizzled bounty hunter Clint and plucky saloon girl Annie, battling their way through hordes of metallic cowboys in an attempt to bring down the gang that killed Annie's parents. And for our money, it's the finest game of its type on the Super Nintendo console, and quite possibly, any other platform too.

Wild Guns was developed by Japanese software studio Natsume, probably best known in the West as the publisher of the *Harvest Moon* farming RPG



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** NATSUME/TITUS (EU)
- » **DEVELOPER:** NATSUME
- » **RELEASED:** 1994
- » **PLATFORM:** SNES
- » **GENRE:** ACTION



» [SNES] The local saloon is a hangout for lowlifes, outlaws, and cyborg bartenders.



"We felt that the game wouldn't be flashy enough with only the Western setting"

Toshiyasu Miyabe

franchise. The bulk of the project was created by a small three-man team, game designer and graphic artist Shunichi Taniguchi, programmer Toshiyasu Miyabe, and musician and sound designer Hiroyuki Iwatsuki. It was the result of a request from Natsume for an original game that could be completed quickly and cheaply. The development time for the game was a surprisingly short five months.

"At the time, Taniguchi-san liked the arcade game *Dynamite Duke* and I was a big fan of the arcade game [and the similarly Western-themed] *Blood Bros.*," remembers Miyabe. "So we thought about making a similar pseudo-3D shooting game. Since it's a shooting game that uses guns, the Wild West setting was only natural. However, we also felt that the game wouldn't be flashy enough with only the Western setting, so we added the sci-fi elements." Adding futuristic elements, inspired in part by the manga *Cobra*, turned *Wild Guns* into something quite unique, giving it the feel of something akin to a cross between the old *Wild Wild West* TV show and the Saturday morning anime *Battle Of The Planets*. Throw in an epic Morricone-style soundtrack, including a riff cheekily lifted straight from *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*, and it's fair to say the team ended up with something rather special.

Wild Guns appeared relatively late in the life of the SNES console, debuting in 1994 in Japan, North America a year later, and only making it to European stores in 1996. When work began, the trio had recently completed an update of Taito's *The Nnja Warriors* for the SNES, and were keen to continue on the platform, despite the onset of the new generation of gaming machines including the upcoming PlayStation. "We had experience working on the SNES and were all set with the development environment and tools," explains Miyabe. "We really wanted to try and master development on the SNES rather than spreading out our resources learning a new system."

A lot of the development time was devoted to fine-tuning the controls. The playable characters, Clint and Annie, were named after a suggestion from Natsume's American office, no doubt inspired by legendary sharpshooter Annie Oakley and a certain low plains drifter**.** Originally each character's gunsight was locked horizontally, with the player only being able to move it up and down and by moving their onscreen avatar left or right. After this version proved understandably ▶

WILD GUNS RELOADED

Natsume's remaster of *Wild Guns* surprised many when it was first announced early last year for the PlayStation 4, but it proved to be quite a draw when demonstrated at the E3 and other gaming events that same year. To all intents and purposes its the same SNES game that those lucky enough to get to play first time round will remember, but it's been completely overhauled for widescreen HD systems with improved detail (especially noticeable in the rendering and animation of bosses) and a completely remixed soundtrack. Two new characters, Bullet the dachshund, with his floating drone pal, and Doris, a crazy grenade-throwing lady, have been added, which both play very differently from the original Clint and Annie. The game also now supports local co-op multiplayer for up to four people. Even better, *Wild Guns Reloaded* includes two all-new stages derived from ideas the team had at the time of the original game but couldn't implement, namely a subterranean base plus a spectacular assault on a fleet of airborne battleships. There's also a new laser weapon, which proves a lot of fun to use. Unfortunately there's no online multiplayer mode, which feels like a bit of an oversight. And there isn't a European physical disc release, unlike North America, meaning it feels a bit expensive at £24.99 for the download. Having said that, though, that's peanuts compared to what the SNES version will set you back nowadays.



» [SNES] Boom! That'll learn him.





» [SNES] To get into the gold mine you need to take down this Stetson-wearing robot gunslinger. And he'll be back.



» Original concept art for Clint and Annie.





▶ difficult to play, the control system was switched to allow independent movement of the crosshair in relation to Clint or Annie. "Coming up with a good control method using the buttons of the SNES was tough," admits Miyabe. But what resulted was a flexible system, using only three buttons, allowing Clint and Annie to jump and roll their way out of danger, shoot, lasso and freeze enemies (by double tapping the fire button), and trigger a screen-clearing dynamite blast when things got a bit hairy. The lasso dynamic turned out to be particularly useful in two-player co-op sessions, allowing one player to momentarily stun enemies and even bosses while the other concentrated on taking them down with munitions.

Because the pseudo-3D depth of the screen sometimes made it difficult to determine the precise location of enemy bullets, the team also added a pop-up 'look out!' speech bubble to help players better keep track of incoming fire from the bad guys. "We always kept in our mind about how to avoid unreasonable or unfair deaths, and the answer to this was to add a signal that lets the player know that a bullet was coming towards their character," Miyabe explains. "We were able to achieve this game balance, however, at the same time it created some tricky bugs that gave us a hard time to fix."

One of the game's many neat touches is the fact that nearly everything rendered in such beautiful pixel art can be destroyed, or at least visibly ridden with bullet holes. This includes most of the backgrounds, where bottles break, signs smash, barrels shatter, objects catch fire, and more. "The destroyable backgrounds were difficult, but what really gave us a hard time was the fact that we had to create [all] the 'destroyed' graphics by hand," Miyabe reflects. "But we wanted to give players an exciting and exhilarating

BOSS RUSH



GIANT MECH

■ This armoured robot comes equipped with an enormous Gatling gun and shoulder-launched missiles, meaning you don't want to make him angry. His weak spot is his head, so blast it until it pops off so you can head into the bar for a celebratory bourbon.



DESERT TANK

■ Possibly the most visually impressive boss in the game, this eight wheeled monstrosity features rotating axles and turret, and a screen-filling flamethrower. Not great when all you have for protection is a revolver and a blue cotton bonnet.



CRAB GUARDIAN

■ It's possibly surprising to find a crab in the middle of Nevada given its arid climate, but hey ho. He's a sort of crustacean Smaug, guarding the treasures of the gold mine stage, and he likes to freeze you before stomping on you with his big pincers.



» [SNES] This shooting gallery stage pops up as a bonus level in the Japanese version. It's also available as a minigame.

feeling when they played the game, as well as give them the catharsis of destroying various objects. Also, because the levels don't scroll in any way, we concentrated on how we could increase the gameplay using just one screen. And to increase the feeling of the Wild West setting, we added a heat haze effect. I came up with this idea after seeing *RoboCop 3*!"

It was important to the team that *Wild Guns* was an enjoyable co-op two player game, and indeed this is one of the title's most enjoyable features. There's nothing quite like taking down a hulking great robot or a massive flame-throwing tank in the middle of the Arizona desert with a buddy. "Our main goal was to surprise the player, and we emphasised the size of the bosses and their attack methods," says Miyabe. Care was taken to ensure that each of the boss fights was challenging but fair, and that targets and weak points were easily visible, highlighted by flashing indicators when hit. *Wild Guns* even makes it easier to practice the stage and boss of your choice by allowing players to select the order in which they tackle the middle four areas of the game, which include a gold mine, an ammunition factory and a moving armoured train.

Due to being released towards the end of the life of the SNES, *Wild Guns* didn't make a huge impact at the time, despite positive reviews praising its gameplay, visuals and sound. However, in retrospect, the game has taken on the mantle of bona fide cult classic, with copies changing hands on Ebay for surprisingly large sums, something which hasn't escaped the notice of Miyabe."Yes," he laughs, "we've seen it being sold for more than 100,000 Yen [about £700] in Japan, and, of course, we each have a copy for ourselves!"

> **"We've seen it being sold for more than 100,000 Yen in Japan!"**
>
> Toshiyasu Miyabe

Fortunately, there are several other ways to get to play *Wild Guns* these days, and the game stands up surprisingly more than two decades on, retaining its fun playability, and feeling as timeless as Gene Wilder in *Blazing Saddles* and Jane Fonda in *Cat Balou*. The title was rereleased on the Virtual Console for Nintendo's Wii in 2010, the Wii U in 2014, and more recently a remastered version, *Wild Guns Reloaded* was launched on the PS4, with plans for a PC port via Steam to be released later this year. This new version features updated widescreen HD graphics coupled with classic gameplay and stages from the original, along with two all-new characters, simultaneous four player co-op, and two bonus levels inspired by ideas that never made it into the SNES version.

"When we started development on *Wild Guns Reloaded*, we were anxious about whether a retro-looking game would fit in today's market," says Miyabe of the project that reunited the original trio to reprise *Wild Guns* for modern audiences. "However, looking back on what we have created, we felt that the same essence and core enjoyment was there even after 22 years." As to why the game was released as a PS4 exclusive, Miyabe explains: "We had the console we wanted to release the game on in our mind when we started, and because this game was made by just the three of us, we concentrated on one platform."

The new characters in *Wild Guns Reloaded* are distinctly different from Clint and Annie, who played all but the same bar for one of them wearing a dress. Bullet is a small sausage dog with a floating robot drone, while Doris is a lady who likes to rely on explosive grenades. "It was really difficult to finalise Doris and Bullet, but we always had in our mind to make these new characters have a different style of play from Clint and Annie," says Miyabe.

True to its roots on the SNES, the team was keen to ensure the retro influence extended to other areas of the remaster. "When we made the new music, we actually started by making songs using the SNES sound source," he reveals, "and then arranged it like we did with the other music in the game."

We mention to Miyabe that despite its lack of popularity when it first arrived, it feels like his game is finally being recognised for its unique and enduring appeal amongst retro-minded fans. "Well, firstly, thanks for the compliment," he replies. "As for us, we feel like there are hardcore fans of the game, but, frankly speaking, the three of us don't feel like it's that popular!" But then, you could say that about the film *Once Upon A Time* in the West. And that's terrific. *



» [SNES] "Annie are you okay? Are you okay Annie?"



CYCLOPS BOT

■ This glassy-eyed terror droid pops up at the end of the ammo depot level and has a mean ability to freeze you on the spot before peppering you with bullets if you're not careful. Luckily, shatterproof glass hasn't been invented yet in the Wild West.



ARMOURED TRAIN

■ This stage of *Wild Guns* is one of our favourites, as you scoot along the roof of rumbling carriages, blasting the enemy on an unexplained parallel track. Looking like a giant hovering sandcrawler this boss is very *Star Wars*, except for being a train.



GANGBOSS KID

■ The final boss is the head of the Kid family that killed Annie's parents, and he reminds us a bit of Dr Loveless in *Wild Wild West*, by inhabiting a giant robot/ship thingy. Shoot his minions and gun sentry towers then blast him. Revenge is yours.

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come



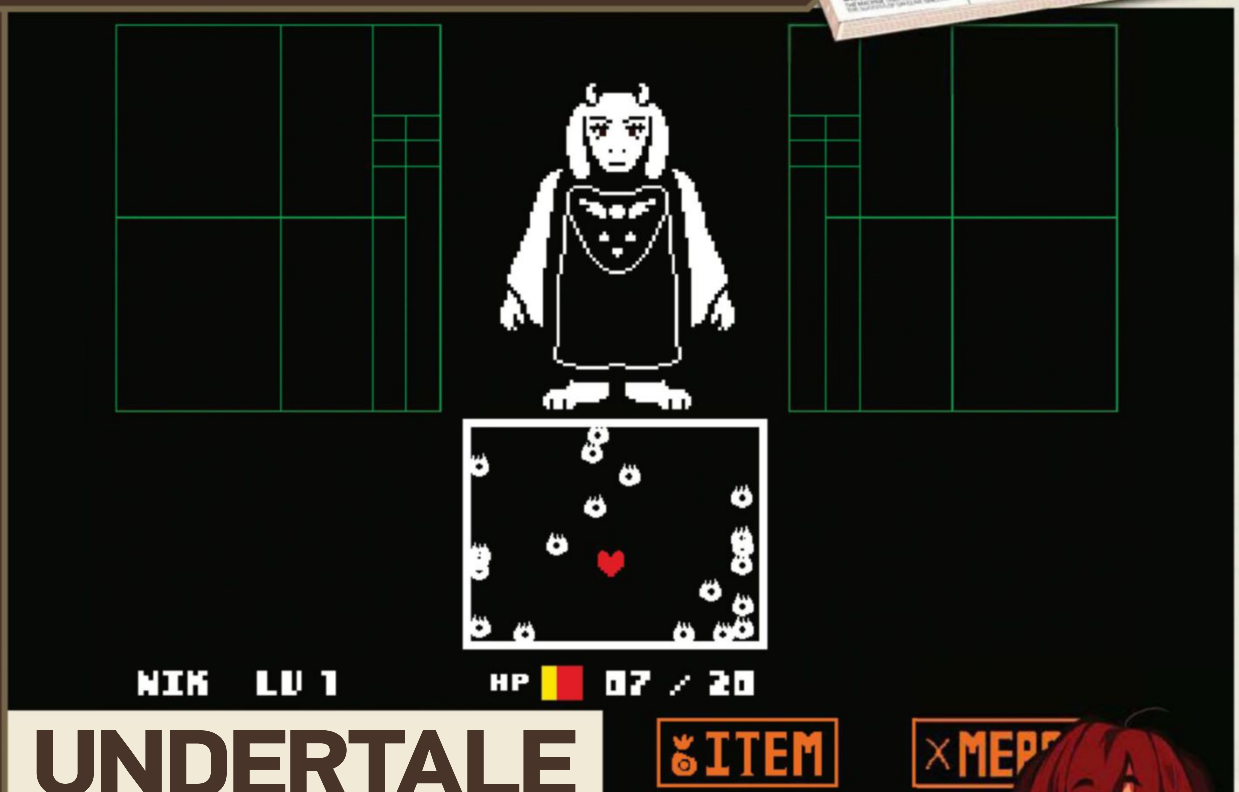
Info

- **» Featured System:** PC
- **» Year:** 2015
- **» Developer:** Toby Fox
- **» Key People:** Toby Fox (game design, writing, art, music), Temmie Chang (additional art)

Go Deeper

» A scrapped idea for the game was the inclusion of a numerical 'Karma' value to indicate the player's morality.

» Spells were detailed in early documents, like a hitbox-shrinking spell, a speed-boosting spell and a healing spell, but magic was ultimately cut from the game.



63. UNDERTALE

This RPG rose to become the word-of-mouth hit of 2015, and it'll still be remembered decades later. Nick Thorpe explains the ascent of this unlikely cult classic…

THE BACKGROUND

Toby Fox wasn't the most likely of videogame developers. As a major fan of Japanese RPGs from the SNES, he'd dabbled in *Earthbound* ROM hacks and played around with RPG Maker. However, he'd never finished a full game before. Despite this, he was able to work with the game creation software GameMaker: Studio to create a battle system which was the genesis of the *Undertale* concept.

Characters and settings were influenced by a variety of sources, including the amusing and unsettling tone of *Earthbound*, the ridiculousness of internet culture and even sitcoms like *Mr Bean*. One of Toby's goals was to create characters that mattered – rather than the largely interchangeable enemies of most RPGs, *Undertale*'s enemies would be able to communicate their unique personalities via mid-battle conversations. Other goals during development were to avoid the need to grind for experience, and avoid including fetch quests.

With a demo ready to go, Toby Fox took *Undertale* to Kickstarter in June 2013, with a $5,000 goal and an expected completion date of August 2014. Within a day, $10,000 had been raised. The campaign ended at $51,124, but development took longer than expected and the final product arrived in September 2015. By February of 2016, the game had surpassed one million sales, and the game was announced for PS4 and Vita in 2017.

THE GAME

Undertale casts you as a child that has fallen from Mount Ebott into the Underground, a place where monsters have lived ever since losing a war with humans. The child soon meets a bizarre cast of characters – the first of which is Flowey, a smiling flower who immediately tries to kill the child for his own amusement. After being rescued by Toriel, a kindly monster who teaches the player about combat and puzzle solving, the child goes on to explore other locations and meet new characters. These characters include the likes of Napstablook, a ghost DJ with crippling low self esteem; Sans, a slacker skeleton with a love of puns; Papyrus, aspiring Royal Guard member and somewhat oblivious brother to Sans; and Alphys,





» [PC] Monster behaviour makes sense in context. Grillby, flame-headed proprietor of Grillby's, has an aversion to water.



» [PC] Hazards arrive in battle by all kinds of routes, like Napstablook crying tears into the bullet box.



» You'll frequently come across Sans and Papyrus.



» [PC] Deadpan commentary on odd sights is key to the humour of *Undertale*.

Things of note

MEANINGFUL NAMES



Toriel is named after her role as a tutorial character, while Sans and Papyrus deliver their dialogue in their respective fonts.

NEVER FORGET



If you opt to complete a 'genocide run', you'll never be allowed to forget it as the game permanently alters the pacifist ending to respond to this.

MYSTERY MAN



Who is WD Gaster? The former royal scientist is referenced in code, but doesn't appear in the game – not that that's diminished his popularity with fans.

SOUND OF THE UNDERGROUND



Undertale is renowned for its soundtrack, spawning many fan remixes and even a special double vinyl official soundtrack.

AUTHOR INSERT



Toby Fox doesn't insert himself into the game, but his avatar does appear. The Annoying Dog frequently ruins plans and leaves its residue in your inventory.

> "Toby Fox has weaved a lot of clever mechanical work into the game"



» [PC] The actions available to you in battle vary by enemy – we've just complimented this one.

a reclusive scientist whose knowledge of the human world is derived from anime.

Many of the situations you'll find yourself in are absurd. Whether you're engaging in a cooking lesson with a boss or encouraging a snail during a race, a bizarre sense of humour permeates *Undertale*. This is enhanced by the game's graphical style, which treads a fine line between being stylistically simple and simply bad – the crude artwork in exploration scenes and monochrome monsters in battle suggest that the game doesn't take itself too seriously.

As you proceed through the Underground, you'll battle monsters. To defend against attacks, you take control of a heart-shaped cursor and dodge around incoming projectiles, much as in a shoot-'em-up. Attacks are performed with timed button presses. You can also perform other actions, including talking to or flirting with the monsters, and of course using items. The option not to attack is important, as you can choose to spare monsters – in fact, you can make your way through the game without killing any of them.

This battle system is explored in great depth, conveying the personality of the enemies through their attacks and responses to your actions. For example, Napstablook's projectiles take the form of tears that fall into the playing area, and canine enemies can be placated by throwing a stick. Later on, you'll encounter attacks that will only harm you if you're still or moving, and bosses that change how your cursor moves.

Unusually, *Undertale* is an RPG that is designed to be replayed. Your first run should take less than ten hours, and the story changes depending on your actions during the course of the game. You can go for pacifism, genocide, or hover somewhere in between, killing off some characters and befriending others. These actions don't just determine your ending – they also change dialogue and events well before you get there.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

There's a mistake that everyone makes in their first attempt at *Undertale* – accidentally killing Toriel. The natural impulse is to reload your last save, but doing so causes Flowey to comment on what you did, and even Toriel notes that you look like you've "seen a ghost". This one incident captures what's so great about *Undertale* – Toby Fox has weaved a lot of clever mechanical work into the game, and the character writing is of high quality no matter whether it's intended to be whimsical or unsettling. There will definitely be a wave of *Undertale* nostalgia for that very reason, as the game has inspired a passionate fanbase.

But even if you don't care for the story and sense of humour, *Undertale* is important because it dares to play with the conventions of its genre. If you've always liked the stories and characters of RPGs but couldn't stand menu-based battles, grinding or sticking to one game for over 50 hours, *Undertale* is a game that shows that a different approach to the genre is viable. *

Special thanks to Rebekka Hearl for providing illustrations of *Undertale*'s cast.

Pocket



Two decades ago, micro-gaming was all the rage. There was Tamagotchi, Digimon and, of course, the PocketStation. Mitch Wallace explores the pixel matrix and recounts Sony's original foray into the handheld space

For anyone who wasn't a kid during the Nineties virtual pet craze, it's difficult to comprehend the appeal of a needy key chain device. There was just something strangely appealing about carrying around an LCD pet and being at its constant beck and call. Demand for these toys was sky high, with Tamagotchi, Dinkie Dinos, Giga Pets and Nano Babies selling out as fast as they could hit store shelves. These tiny digital companions were everywhere and, unsurprisingly, it wasn't long before major videogame companies decided they wanted in on the pocket-sized frenzy.

It may be safe to assume that the most well-known of these attempts was Sega's Dreamcast VMU (Visual Memory Unit), or as it was known in Japan, VMS (Visual Memory System). At a fundamental level, the VMU was first and foremost a run-of-the-mill memory card, required storage hardware used for saving game progress, profiles and high scores. But this wasn't just any memory card; beyond the 128KB of save space, the handheld also sported a fully functional directional pad, A and B buttons, Sleep and Mode inputs, a small speaker, and most importantly, a 48x32 screen. When plugged into the Dreamcast controller, this display would showcase extras from games, or in rare cases, like *Virtua Tennis*, allow direct play through the miniscule window. When detached from the controller, various minigames and side applications could then be played during long train rides or unbearably boring work meetings.

In Japan, the VMU itself launched prior to the Dreamcast by way of a *Godzilla*-themed special edition in July of 1998. But perhaps unknown to many current-day PlayStation fans, Sony wasn't far behind with a similar device of its very own: the Pocketstation. Why the relative obscurity? The answer is rather simple: much to the dismay of eager potential adopters in the UK, US and other excluded regions, the PocketStation never made it outside of Japan, and that's despite some rather eager global anticipation. So what could have possibly prevented Sony from bringing its tiny device to other markets? Truthfully, there are a few reasons.

But before that particular subject can be tackled head-on, it must be asked: What was the PocketStation, exactly? In a general sense, it was a device rather analogous to Sega's VMU. Essentially a souped-up 15-block memory card, it was similar in both construction and function to the Dreamcast's companion unit. The PocketStation had a directional pad of sorts, though instead of a traditional cross shape, it was comprised of four separate buttons. There was also a single large action button situated to the right of the directional layout, an infrared sensor for data transfer and multiplayer ▶



» [PocketStation] Chicobos (well, baby Chocobos) are even cuter in monochrome pixels.



» [PocketStation] The Japanese version of *Harvest Moon* has a PocketStation game of its own.

PLAY IT TODAY

■ Back in November of 2013, Sony announced the rerelease of the PocketStation. Or to be more accurate, a PocketStation emulator for the Vita. Japanese gamers could download the app, and whenever a compatible PSone classic was launched, an option to boot the PocketStation software would appear in tandem. It is still available today, but if you don't have a Japanese PSN account, you can still get a taste of PocketStation action through PC-based emulators.



Station



FIVE KEY GAMES

CHOCOBO WORLD

■ One of the few PocketStation games to sneak outside of Japan, this enjoyable addendum to *Final Fantasy VIII* has players guiding Boko, an endearing baby Chocobo, across maps filled with Active Time Battles and items that can be transferred to Squall's console adventure.



GO! GO! DIGGER



■ Also a result of a PocketStation-happy Squaresoft, this excavation minigame can be readily downloaded and played via localised versions of *SaGa Frontier 2*. Command various diggers to mine useful items that can then be transferred back into the main game.

POCKET ALPHA 3

■ Accessible only via a Gameshark in Western copies, *Street Fighter Alpha 3*'s virtual pet simulator allows players to train and level up combatants while on the go, battle them across other PocketStations and upload the improved fighters back to the host game for better stats.



POCKET MUUMUU



■ This Japanese *Jumping Flash* spinoff is essentially a collection of various PocketStation minigames. They range from fishing to fortune telling, fly swatting to alien abduction. If you have a Japanese PlayStation, the sheer variety of games on offer makes this one to check out.

POCKET RAY

■ Bundled with the Japanese release of *RayCrisis*, this surprisingly fun minigame was removed from other versions. It's basically a shooting gallery in which players lock onto moving enemy targets to destroy them. Incredibly simple arcade action that's perfect for the PocketStation's tiny screen.





» [PocketStation] In the *Mega Man* PocketStation games, you fight against the series' robot bosses.



» [PocketStation] PocketStation-sized Ken and Ryu battle it out on the handheld's miniscule screen.

sessions with other PocketStations, an ARM7T 32-bit RISC chip CPU, a single small speaker, and, to top it all off, a tiny monochrome 32x32 screen. While the PocketStation could be used as a traditional storage device for saving data, users could also flip up its hatch, plug it into the nearest PlayStation, and download portable minigames that could be played while out and about. Upon return to the PlayStation system, these miniaturised apps would typically sync up and augment their fully-fledged console counterparts in interesting ways. Ways that, apparently, were not interesting enough to warrant wider distribution, as Sony ultimately decided against exporting the experience.

To gain some context, it's important to note that the PocketStation was officially released in Japan on 23 January 1999. A launch that was delayed an entire month past the originally planned 23 December 1998 date. Sony cited general production issues for the extended wait, allegedly wanting extra time to produce enough PocketStations to meet consumer demand. Beyond that statement, there were rumours that the initial test run of the devices had battery issues and needed tweaking. But even after the pushback, only a reported 60,000 units were shipped to Japanese retailers. Upon its Eastern unveiling, the Pocketstation sold out at every major electronics retailer, seeing many Tamagotchi-loving gamers leaving businesses empty-handed. Supply issues continued to plague Japanese videogame sellers far into 1999, with some retailers only getting 50 or so units in stock at a time, all of which would immediately go to early risers who swooped in and snapped them up.

Plans to bring the PocketStation to the US, UK and other territories were never officially confirmed by Sony, and by the time the new millennium arrived the writing was on the wall: Sony's device would never hit the West. And even though the PocketStation bordered on niche gimmick, its failure to launch worldwide is still a genuine shame. By early 1999, consistent media coverage had built up a good deal of hype for the device, and consequently a sizable chunk of the PlayStation audience was patiently waiting for the day they could get their hands on the very first portable PlayStation machine.







DREAMCAST VMU

Communication
In order to have two VMUs communicate, you need to uncap their tops and plug them directly into each other.

Display
The VMU has a 48x32 monochrome LCD screen, perfect for on-the-go minigames or attention-grabbing notifications while it's inside the Dreamcast's controller.

Input
The VMU interface is basically set up like a miniature Game Boy – full directional pad, A and B buttons, as well as Sleep and Mode inputs.

Battery
Two CR2032 batteries power Sega's VMU. Really, they don't last long at all, leading to the infamous (and recurring) beeping Dreamcast boot-up sound.



Communication
For data transfer, Sony's device forgoes any semblance of physical hookups and instead utilises an infrared sensor atop the screen.

Display
The PocketStation boasts a 32x32 monochrome LCD screen, which is undoubtedly small, but surprisingly, it gets the job done.

Input
No traditional directional pad here. Only four separate buttons that approximate directions, as well as one prominent action button.

Battery
The PocketStation only runs on a single CR2032 lithium battery, but expect to be replacing it often, as with regular use the charge doesn't last long.

POCKETSTATION

Sadly, that day never came. Sony's official reason for the cancellation boiled down to all the trouble it was having keeping up with demand in Japan. It's a strange excuse for an electronics giant to make, especially given the admittedly low-tech nature of the PocketStation. Still, production difficulties no doubt played at least a passing part in the distribution debacle. On the other hand, it could have had something to do with the impending release of the PlayStation 2 (which ended up being PocketStation-compatible, incidentally), or simply a lack of sales faith in foreign markets. An odd reservation if true, because from New York to London and everywhere in between, the success of virtual pets seemed ubiquitous, so it's fair to assume that the device would have done well in other regions. Regardless, Sony announced the discontinuation of the PocketStation in Japan in July 2002. Despite production issues, the handheld managed to sell just under 5 million units in three years, an impressive feat for something that was difficult to manufacture and even more difficult to keep on store shelves.



One might think that a device relegated to just one territory would be limited in terms of software, but the PocketStation enjoyed a decent amount of developer support in Japan, both in terms of first-party studios and various third-party outfits. The first two *Spyro The Dragon* titles featured *Sparx Special Training!* and *Sparx Adventure*, minigames in which you raised, bred and trained dragonflies. *Crash Bandicoot: Warped* showcased a minigame in which you collected photos of the orange marsupial in various states of insanity. *Monster Farm 2* (*Monster Rancher 2* in the West) let you use your monster to collect DNA capsules and unlock the elusive and rare monster, Moo. And that's just the tip of the iceberg, because the list continues: *Ape Escape*, *Grandia*, *RayCrisis*, *Pocket Digimon World*, *Legend Of Mana*, *Super Robot Wars Alpha*, *The Legend of Dragoon*, *Rockman Complete Works*, *Jade Cocoon*, and *Gran Turismo 2* all contained support for the device.

Before it was clear that Sony wasn't going to bring its hardware outside of Japan, support made it into several Western releases. *Final Fantasy VIII* retained its PocketStation compatibility in the form of *Chocobo World*, which let players adventure with a titular yellow bird and acquire unlockables


» [PocketStation] What would a virtual pet-esque device be without a proper *Digimon* application?


» [PocketStation] With only a handful of proper pixels, alien abduction has never looked better.

for use in the main game. Proving how close the rest of the world was to getting the device, Squaresoft even kept PocketStation information in the instruction manual for translated versions of *FFVIII*, just in case Sony brought the device overseas. The same can be said of Squaresoft's *SaGa Frontier 2*, which arrived on foreign shores with its item excavation Pocketstation application *Go! Go! Digger* both intact and detailed inside the printed instructions insert.

Moving past role-playing titles, *R4: Ridge Racer Type 4* also retained localised support, a feature that allowed players to trade cars while away from their PlayStations. Additionally, *Street Fighter Alpha 3* held onto its Japanese *Pocket Zero* fighter-training app in the form of *Pocket Alpha 3*, though you needed a Gameshark to unlock it.

Since the PocketStation was region free, an imported unit would work just fine with these translated games. Also interesting was the fact that if you plugged a PocketStation into any region's PS2, a 3D PocketStation unit would appear on the file management screen, suggesting that Sony was considering continued support or even an altogether relaunched product.

As things would play out, the PSP was the next handheld on Sony's agenda. Today, a loose PocketStation can be purchased off for a affordable amount; there's the original white version, as well as a translucent variant. And if you're looking to explore an obscure side of PlayStation history, or if you simply want to expand your *Final Fantasy VIII* experience, it's worth picking up. Though above everything else, the PocketStation is a quirky reminder of the industry's willingness to take risks. More specifically, it showed that Sony was eager to experiment and was not afraid to go out on a limb and release a strange little pendant filled with bleeps, bloops and monsters. *

Minority Report

INTERESTING GAMES YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED



GAME BOY ADVANCE

When you consider that over a thousand games were released for the Game Boy Advance, it goes without saying that the format has more than its fair share of hidden gems to discover – so let's get to it, shall we?

NINJA COP

■ DEVELOPER: **HUDSON SOFT** ■ YEAR: **2003**

■ While games featuring ninjas were very much in vogue during the 8-bit and 16-bit eras, at the turn of the new millennium they fell somewhat out of fashion – as indeed did pretty much any game which leveraged cheesy Eighties action movies as its basis of inspiration. That goes some way to explaining how a title as downright amazing as *Ninja Cop* could possibly slip under the radar of any self-respecting Game Boy Advance owner. With its archaic premise and admittedly silly title, it hit Western store shelves in 2003 (no Japanese release was forthcoming, oddly) and promptly vanished almost as quickly.

Coded by the now-defunct Hudson Soft and published by Konami – the company which purchased and absorbed Hudson in 2011 – *Ninja Cop* is best described as *Revenge Of Shinobi*, crossed with *Elevator Action Returns*, crossed with *Bionic Commando*. It showcases the shuriken-hurling gameplay of Sega's Mega Drive classic as well as the multilevelled exploration of Data East's 1995 coin-op sequel. Finally, lead character Joe Osugi's ability to grapple to certain surfaces instantly calls to mind Capcom's NES title. Such an unusual fusion of games might seem awkward, but in the hands of Hudon's expert developers it comes together beautifully.

The storyline is wafer-thin, with 'anti-terrorist ninja' Osugi being the only option for a desperate government when a network of rather nasty bad guys (controlled by ninja masters, of course) decides to take hold of several key locations, such as banks, airports and dimly-lit caves. This lightweight premise serves as little more than an excuse for 15 levels of ninja-related mayhem, and in keeping with some of the finest action titles of the Eighties and Nineties, *Ninja Cop* boasts some bonkers boss characters which have no real basis in reality; one end-of-level guardian is a giant fire-breathing toad, for example.

On paper, *Ninja Cop* – known in North America as *Ninja Five-0*, a title so bad it almost surely contributed to its dire commercial performance in that region – looks like a shameless rip-off with no genuine ideas of its own; taken at face value, this isn't a totally unreasonable assumption to make. While *Ninja Cop* isn't all that original and doesn't attempt to create a storyline that will grip or surprise you, the way in which it mixes and melds these pre-existing gameplay ideas is nothing short of masterful; elegantly combining Osugi's moves to take down enemies, locate key-cards and rescue hostages never gets old, and this is undoubtedly one of the slickest games of this type ever created.

Ninja Cop was almost entirely ignored at the time of release and as a result it received a tiny print run, and was never released in Japan, despite being coded there. As time has passed and word of the game's quality has spread online, we've seen this hidden gem swell in value – even sourcing an unboxed copy is going to cost you dearly these days. Konami has never rereleased *Ninja Cop* on any kind of digital download service, so unless you're comfortable with emulation, you're going to need very deep pockets to sample this underappreciated classic.

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



THE REVENGE OF SHINOBI

MEGA DRIVE

■ The home console sequel to the classic *Shinobi* coin-op, complete with an amazing Yuzo Koshiro soundtrack.



ELEVATOR ACTION RETURNS

SATURN

■ Data East's 1995 sequel added more action and depth with incredible, sprawling levels.



BIONIC COMMANDO

NES

■ Inspired by the arcade game, this NES platformer is based around the use of a grappling hook.

IN DEPTH



KNOW YOUR ENEMY

■ Foes patrol each stage, and you'll need to combine your ninja skills to find the best way to deal with them.

LEVEL UP

■ Collect lightning bolt symbols to increase your power. You can power up three times, but get hit and you'll drop a level.

RESCUE MISSION

■ The remaining number of hapless hostages are shown here – explore every nook and cranny of each level to find all of them.

GRAPPLE FOR GLORY

■ You can use your grappling hook to latch onto these ledges and fling yourself upwards in order to get yourself in a better position.

Minority Report

HAJIME NO IPPO: THE FIGHTING

■ PUBLISHER: **TREASURE** ■ YEAR: **2002**

■ **Based on the Japanese manga series, *Hajime No Ippo: The Fighting* is the handiwork of legendary codehouse Treasure (*Radiant Silvergun, Gunstar Heroes*), which should be reason enough for most gamers to sit up and take notice, irrespective of how they feel about Japanese animation or the sport of boxing.** Inspired by Nintendo's *Punch-Out!!* series, *Hajime No Ippo* gives you a first-person view of the action, with only your boxer's gloves visible. As you might expect, the objective is to knock out your opponent, and to do this you need to master the art of dodging blows and countering with your own flurry.

Punches can be combined with a push on the d-pad to perform different variants, and each fighter has unique combinations which can be exploited after a blow successfully lands. Defensive and offensive specials drastically improve your chances of success, while blocking is done automatically as long as you're not pushing a direction or attempting to throw a punch; however, should you turtle up for too long then your guard will be shattered, leaving you open to a beating. Like *Punch-Out!!*, *Hajime No Ippo* is about looking for patterns and timing your dodges in order to open up your rival and land a succession of hits. Each fighter has their own style so it's not always as simple as finding a preferred tactic and sticking to it.

The intricacies of game's story mode will be lost on anyone who can't read Japanese but it's possible to muddle through without understanding the plot. The visuals are uncharacteristically bold for a GBA game, with large, well-animated sprites doing an excellent job of replicating the look and feel of the original cartoon.





» [GBA] Each fighter has a special move, which inflicts plenty of damage – try not to be on the receiving end of one of these if you can help it.



» [GBA] If you're a fan of the original manga the game is based upon, then you will recognise plenty of familiar faces in the game's roster.

MORE GAMES TO PLAY



» STEEL EMPIRE

■ DEVELOPER: **STARFISH**
■ YEAR: **2004**

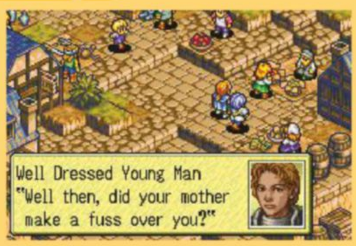
■ Originally released on the Sega Mega Drive in the early Nineties by Japanese studio Hot-B, this steampunk shooter works surprisingly well on the Game Boy Advance's smaller screen, with improved visuals making up for the rather cramped playing area. A Nintendo 3DS remake with enhanced visuals was released recently worldwide and is also well worth investigating; it used the GBA version as a template.



» THE LEGENDARY STARFY

■ DEVELOPER: **TOSE**
■ YEAR: **2002**

■ This is an adorable adventure featuring a character who is just as cute as Kirby, yet the instantly appealing *Starfy* was regrettably never given a chance to impress in the west on the GBA, the format on which he made his debut. The 2008 DS sequel was the only game released outside of Japan, but *Starfy* has been dormant since. If ever there was a character who deserved a reboot, it's this guy.



» TACTICS OGRE: THE KNIGHT OF LODIS

■ DEVELOPER: **QUEST**
■ YEAR: **2001**

■ If you like *Final Fantasy Tactics*, then you'll love this – *Tactics Ogre* is the series which birthed Square Enix's 1997 PlayStation smash and was coded by almost entirely the same team. Hitoshi Sakimoto contributes to the soundtrack, which is fantastic, like all of his other work. You'll have to grab the North American version of this if you're interested – it didn't get a release in Europe.



» MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM SEED: DESTINY

■ DEVELOPER: **NATSUME**
■ YEAR: **2004**

■ A 2D fighting game featuring massive robots from the popular anime and manga series *Mobile Suit Gundam*, this is a surprisingly punchy pocket-sized brawler and one for fans of Capcom's similarly-themed arcade and Saturn fighter *Cyberbots*, for sure. Similar titles were released on the PlayStation as well, but with much more impressive 2D visuals.

GURU LOGI CHAMP

■ DEVELOPER: COMPILE ■ YEAR: 2001

■ **One of the best handheld puzzlers ever made, *Guru Logi Champ*'s Japanese exclusivity is downright bizarre; while a western launch was mooted at one point, it never happened and Compile's excellent spin on picross never saw release outside of its homeland.** It's a crying shame, as it's fun, compelling and almost impossible to leave alone once you begin playing.

You'd be forgiven for thinking that this is nothing more than a clone of the logic puzzle, but once you get past the title screen it becomes clear that this presumption is a hasty one. While the aim is indeed to complete the image by inserting tiles, the way in which you do this makes Compile's approach unique. Blocks are fired into the field of play via a cannon, and can only be shot in a straight line. You can rotate the image itself to shoot the blocks where they need to be, and it's possible to retrieve blocks as well, should you make a mistake or need to remove a block you've used to create a temporary barrier.

Like all good puzzlers, *Guru Logi Champ* gives you a gentle introduction to ease you in before throwing some devilishly tricky conundrums your way. The crazy storyline plays out in cartoon-like cutscenes, while the graphics and audio are both superb. Needless to say, *Guru Logi Champ*'s burgeoning reputation has resulted in vastly inflated prices on the secondary market.

> "It's fun, compelling and almost impossible to leave alone"





» [GBA] The similarities between this and picross are clear; however, you're firing blocks from a cannon in this particular game.

RETRO STINKER

» URBAN YETI

■ DEVELOPER: CAVE BARN STUDIOS ■ YEAR: 2002

■ Some games are so bad they're good and *Urban Yeti* comes close to reaching that level, but ropey controls, poor visuals and a crap concept make this one you should avoid.



» REBELSTAR: TACTICAL COMMAND

■ DEVELOPER: CODO TECHNOLOGIES
■ YEAR: 2005

■ The work of the legendary Julian Gollop and his brother, Nick, *Tactical Command* is in the same vein as *Rebelstar Raiders*, *Laser Squad* and *UFO: Enemy Unknown*, Gollop's other masterpieces. The anime-style visuals really pop on the Game Boy Advance, and the action is perfectly suited to the portable format of the console. Criminally ignored upon release, this is fully deserving of rediscovery today.



» BOKTAI: THE SUN IS IN YOUR HAND

■ DEVELOPER: KONAMI
■ YEAR: 2003

■ From the mind of Hideo Kojima, *Boktai* tasked players with venturing outside to build up sunlight – the cart had a light sensor on the top. It's definitely one of the most unique GBA titles, if a little awkward to play – gamers, stereotypically, aren't fans of the outdoors, after all. The sequels are worth checking out as well, even if the DS outing does away with the sunlight-gathering gameplay.



» ZONE OF THE ENDERS: THE FIST OF MARS

■ DEVELOPER: KONAMI
■ YEAR: 2001

■ Largely forgotten when compared to the PS2 originals, this strategy adventure is surprisingly compelling and worth a look if you're a fan of the genre. The action alternates between the map and a cockpit perspective during combat, and you have some degree of control over landing your attacks, making this much more exciting than your typical strategy release.



» F-ZERO CLIMAX

■ DEVELOPER: SUZAK
■ YEAR: 2004

■ The final Game Boy Advance outing for *F-Zero* – and easily the most visually impressive – *F-Zero Climax* strangely never received a western release but it's perfectly possible to enjoy the Japanese version, despite the language barrier. This is – at the time of writing – the last *F-Zero* game ever made, which is utterly criminal when you think about it. Hopefully Nintendo won't make us wait much longer for a successor on Switch.



BIO

After creating a reputation for phenomenal technical prowess on the 16-bit formats, the ex-Konami coders at Treasure spent much of the late Nineties bucking the trends of the day by producing predominantly 2D games. This approach carried over to the company's debut on Nintendo hardware, with *Mischief Makers*' prerendered sprites being the only concession to modernity. The action platform gameplay revolves around the ability to grab many of the things you can see in order to shake, throw and otherwise manipulate them. A mixed critical reception ensured that even by Treasure's standards, *Mischief Makers* achieved only cult popularity.

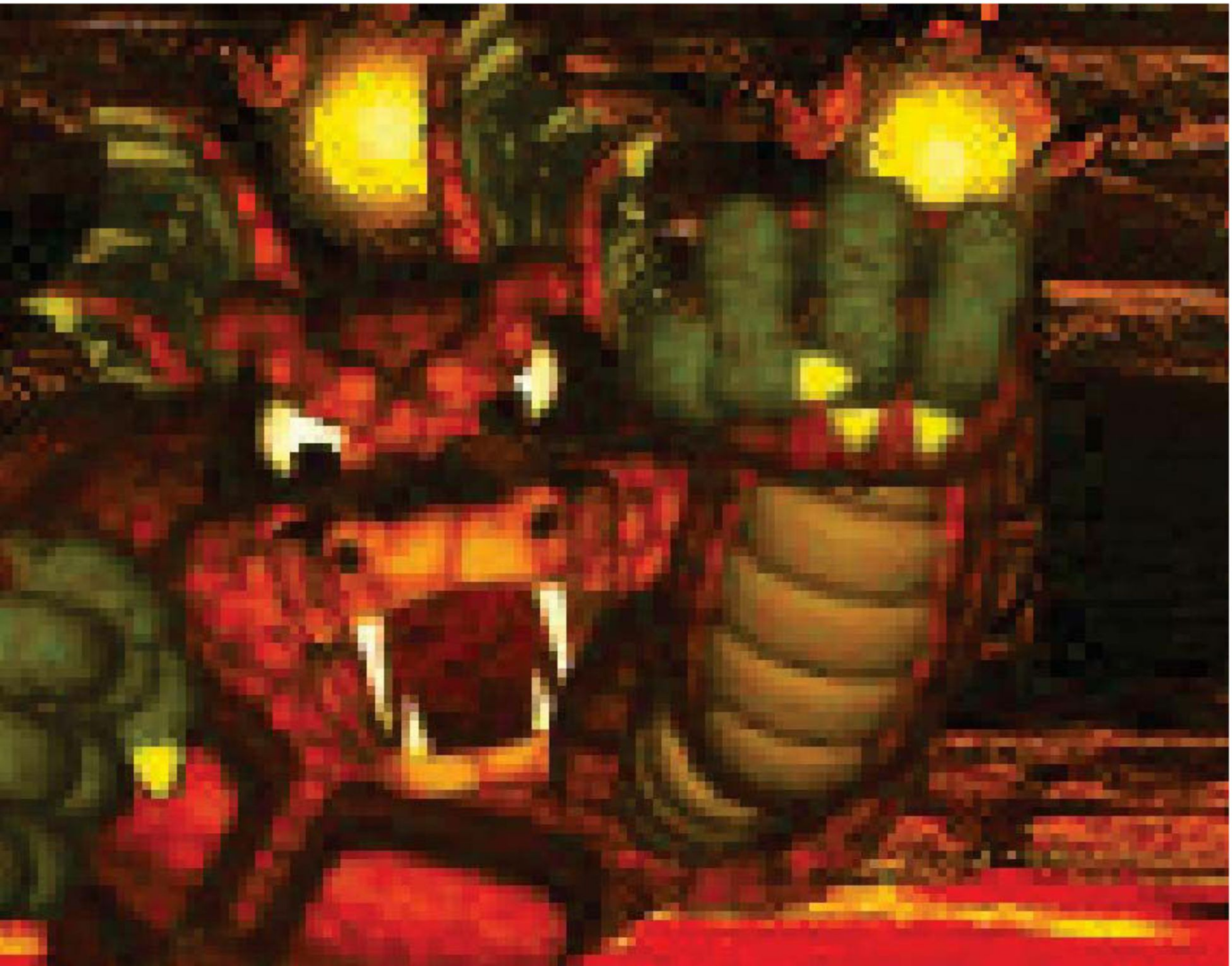
CLASSIC MOMENTS

Mischief Makers

» **PLATFORM:** NINTENDO 64 » **DEVELOPER:** TREASURE » **RELEASED:** 1997

Maybe it was just that *Mischief Makers* wasn't given a high profile, maybe it was that you were expecting more Saturn games after *Guardian Heroes*, but for some reason the fact that Treasure was making a N64 game completely passed you by. Still, you couldn't wait – you'd seen what the Japanese coding maestro had done with lesser formats, and bought the game blind just to see what they could do with the fastest, most powerful games console in the world.

You might have been expecting a dazzling 3D showcase, but by the time you encountered bosses in stage two, that didn't matter – you were in love with 2D games all over again, and convinced that we might have actually moved on too soon. This monstrous firebreathing creature was made of multiple smoothly rotating parts, with more detail and finer colours than you'd ever seen before. Every time you sent its fist reeling back into its own face, the priceless expression confirmed that Treasure could do what it liked and still be ahead of the pack. *



MORE CLASSIC MISCHIEF MAKERS MOMENTS

Character Building



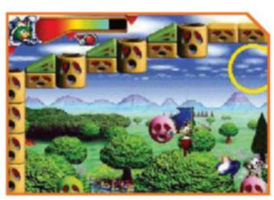
A collection of small things that builds into one big thing is *Mischief Makers*' approach to characterisation. From Marina's utterances of, "Shake, shake," to the ridiculous pomposity with which the various power-up diamonds are introduced, there's a sense of humour that is present without being forced into regular play. This approach clearly marks *Mischief Makers* as a game that could only have come from Treasure.

An Extra Dimension



While *Mischief Makers* is technically a 2D platform game, it does employ 3D elements from time to time when something exciting is needed – and what could be more exciting than the tenth stage, which tasks you with surviving a volcano that spits red-hot death at you in conveniently timed chunks? You'll need to make good use of your dash controls to make it past this.

Amuse Yourself



3D platform games commonly offer the player the ability to simply have fun with the character's abilities, usually as part of a hub world or something similar, but it's quite rare in 2D games – and that's why we love the amusement park section of *Mischief Makers*. You can zoom around on a track, perform long jumps, spring off of things and generally spend time acclimatising to the controls while enjoying yourself.

Blowing Stuff Up



This is a common feature in Treasure games, we know, but the spectacular explosions in *Mischief Makers* are extremely satisfying to be a part of. We often wonder whether we're secretly pyromaniacs deep down inside, but then decide that it's just that Treasure's explosions are very good, and that's the story we'll unwaveringly stick to when the judge asks us, too.



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“We spent all day making games, crunch hadn’t been invented and deciding what to make didn’t require a greenlight”
Simon Phipps

SIMON PHIPPS

From BBC Micro to VR, Simon Phipps has enjoyed a long career as an artist, designer, producer, programmer and even voice actor. Andrew Fisher talks to the multitalented man about his creations

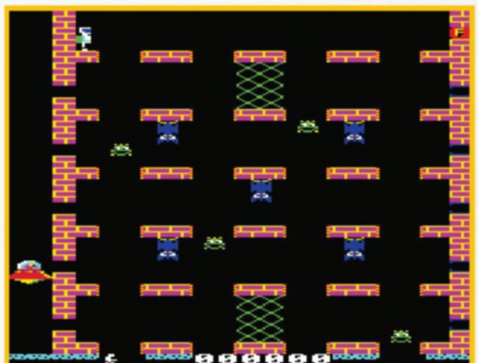
Did Simon always want to be an artist? "I'm a serial collector of skills," he begins. "I have been drawing since I was able to hold a pencil. I grew up watching cartoons and wanted to learn to animate. I saw *Star Wars* and built stacks of model starships, and I wanted to make my own movies. Unfortunately, we never had the money to buy an 8mm camera. So, when home computers arrived and I saw it was possible to draw art and make it move on screen I did all I could to save up for a computer. Making a computer game was the next logical step to getting my art to move."

What were your earliest computer experiences?
My first contact with computers were with the Commodore PETs that we had in the school computer room back in 1981 – writing lots of BASIC and playing *Star Fighter* on lunchtimes. Going around to my friend Phil Basker's house and being shown the ZX81 he and his dad had built from a kit – the 1K version of *Space Invaders* blew my mind. When I realised it would be possible to change the graphics and make animated art, I knew I wanted to get a computer.

What inspired you to make *Jet Power Jack*?
I'd been making a number of small games in BASIC, clones of *Pac-Man*, *Lunar Lander*, etc.. One day I saw Ultimate's *Jetpac*. That inspired me to make a game featuring a guy with a jet pack. Since I hadn't figured screen scrolling on the BBC at the time, making it a single-screen affair was my only option. A&F Software declined it because it wasn't 100 per cent machine code and, according to them, that made it easier to copy!

You ended up joining Gremlin's Derby office – what was it like to work there?
Fun. We spent all day just making games, crunch hadn't been invented and deciding what to make didn't require a 'Green Light Committee'. Lots of banter. Pranks fuelled by the lovely Greg Holmes (who we all called 'Dad' as he was a little bit older than the rest of us). Tea, biscuits, Rob Toone frequently sailing through the office on roller skates – oh, and one day sellotaping Greg's entire development kit to the ceiling.

How did you create the excellent title screen for *Masters Of The Universe: The Movie*?
In the days before scanners, I realised I had only one option – take a big piece of tracing paper, draw a fine grid over it and lay it on top of the movie poster. I spent a couple of days laying down the art, pixel-by-pixel!



» [BBC Micro] Simon's first game, *Jet Power Jack*, was clearly inspired by Ultimate's *Jetpac*.

What are your memories of *Skate Crazy*?
It was a quick project where half the office was making one game for one side of the cassette, the other half making the other. The overriding thing I remember was my time spent with the late Kevin Bulmer, whose sprite art I converted to the C64 – he was an extremely talented and lovely guy who left us all way too soon.

Gremlin's Derby office went on to become Core Design – were you happy?
More than happy – it allowed us to stay working in the office that Gremlin, unfortunately, had to close down, and it opened the door for us making a variety of new games. We needed ideas so Terry Lloyd and I sat and made a list of all the game genres that we could think of, crossing them off if there was something already out

SELECTED TIMELINE

GAMES

- **JET POWER JACK** [BBC MICRO] 1984
- **MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE: THE MOVIE** [ATARI ST] 1987
- **SKATE CRAZY** [C64] 1988
- **NIGHT RAIDER** [SPECTRUM] 1988
- **BIONIC NINJA** [C64] 1989
- **RICK DANGEROUS** [VARIOUS] 1989
- **SAINT & GREAVESIE FOOTBALL TRIVIA QUIZ GAME** [VARIOUS] 1989
- **SWITCHBLADE** [ATARI ST, AMIGA] 1989
- **MONTY PYTHON'S FLYING CIRCUS** [VARIOUS] 1991
- **RICK DANGEROUS 2** [VARIOUS] 1990
- **THUNDERHAWK AH-73M** [ATARI ST, AMIGA] 1991
- **WOLFCHILD** [VARIOUS] 1992
- **ASTERIX AND THE POWER OF THE GODS** [MEGA DRIVE] 1993
- **BUBBA 'N' STIX** [VARIOUS] 1994
- **DRAGONSTONE** [AMIGA] 1995
- **SHELLSHOCK** [PLAYSTATION, SATURN] 1995
- **COLLEGE SLAM** [VARIOUS] 1996
- **SHADOW MAN** [N64, PS1] 1999
- **HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S/ PHILOSOPHER'S STONE** [GBA, PC] 2001
- **SHADOW MAN: 2ECOND COMING** [PS2] 2002
- **HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS** [VARIOUS] 2002
- **HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN** [VARIOUS] 2004
- **HARRY POTTER AND THE GOBLET OF FIRE** [VARIOUS] 2005
- **HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX** [VARIOUS] 2007
- **BURNOUT: PARADISE** [VARIOUS] 2009
- **GOLDENEYE 007** [WII] 2010
- **GOLDENEYE 007: RELOADED** [XBOX 360, PS3] 2011
- **NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED** [VARIOUS] 2012
- **DANGEROUS GOLF** [VARIOUS] 2016
- **LETHAL VR** [PC, PS4] 2017
- **DANGER ZONE** [PC, PS4] 2017

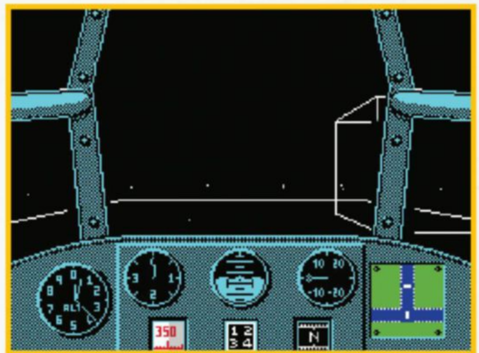
at the time. We realised that an *Indiana Jones*-style game hadn't been made – at least, one that captured those first few minutes of *Raiders*. So we sat down, scribbled down as many ideas for traps and situations as we could – I figured out how we could build a system that would allow us to create all of them with very little code – and went from there.

Do you understand the criticism of *Rick Dangerous*' sudden-death situations?

Absolutely! We built *Rick* at a time where one-hit-and-you're-dead platform games were the norm. We built the game and we were done, although we did scale back the difficulty before we finished (there were some bits that were even harder during development – I know, that's hard to believe). It's only looking back that we realised, by taking the predictability out of our triggering, that the game became more difficult than its peers. We'd created something that became more of a reaction and memory test, full of stabby things that came at you from every angle. That worked for some and infuriated others. To those who loved it, you're welcome. To the others, on behalf of the team, we're very sorry.

***Switchblade* shares similarities with *Rick*, but one great feature is the way unexplored areas stay black. Where did this come from?**

Steve Turner's classic *Ranarama* – I saw the idea and thought, 'I'll have that!'



» [ZX Spectrum] Simon drew the cockpit graphics for *Night Raider*.

***Switchblade* was a very personal project, did you learn a lot from creating it in your 'spare' time?**

That in my twenties I had the energy to work full-time, have a relationship and then code until 2am! Seriously, it was a really great project to do – it allowed me to cut loose and make something entirely personal. The only constraints were my ability to draw and code. Strangely, I began work on *Switchblade* before I began full-time coding at work. Being a spare-time project, by the time I'd finished *Switchblade* I had three other games under my belt. That meant that I had figured out much better solutions and ways to organise my code, so those last few weeks were quite challenging as I was having to delve into some beginner's spaghetti-like coding in order to make final fixes!

***Bubba 'N' Stix* was very Nineties. So how did you come up with a living stick?**

When digitised sprites were in vogue, I was asked to consider making an *Indiana Jones*-style game about an adventurer with a stick that he could use to do loads of different things. I didn't like the thought of making another game in an ancient temple and had no desire to digitise sprites. I always thought that they looked ugly; aside from something with high production values like



» [Amiga] *Rick Dangerous* looked fantastic, but it's high difficulty curve meant that it wasn't for everyone.



» [Amiga] The 'parts of the body' episode inspired the scenery of *Monty Python's* second level.



FIVE TO PLAY The best picks from Phipps



SWITCHBLADE 1989

■ Simon's personal project involved many hours of work and was heavily inspired by Japanese manga, featuring a clever way of hiding unexplored areas. Once the player is used to the unusual fighting method, there is a huge underground city to explore and the broken Fireblade to reassemble.



MONTY PYTHON'S FLYING CIRCUS 1991

■ This surreal game has types of cheese, identifying trees from a long way off, and lots of Spam. Guide Gumby in various forms around the Terry Gilliam-inspired levels to retrieve the four quarters of his missing brain. Indulge in an argument, avoid the Silly Walkers and expect the Spanish Inquisition.



SHADOW MAN 1999

■ Inspired by the graphic novels, voodoo warrior *Shadow Man* must protect the living from the return of dead serial killers including Jack The Ripper (voiced by Simon himself). Large 3D levels and voodoo-inspired weaponry make this a demanding and dark adventure; the sequel only appeared on PS2.



HARRY POTTER & THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE 2001

■ The player controls Harry in this puzzle-based RPG, overcoming the many hazards in Hogwarts and learning spells in class. Split into short sections inspired by the book and with some detailed graphics, this is a good handheld adventure and ideal for younger players.



DANGEROUS GOLF 2016

■ Three Fields Entertainment revived the spirit of *Burnout* with this explosive party game. Shoot a golf ball around various locations to cause damage, racking up combos and launching the fiery 'Smashbreaker', before sinking the putt. It's very satisfying watching the chaotic destruction unfold.

Mortal Kombat, they all looked just what they were – digitised footage of some programmer running around the car park.

The implication was this would be a realistically styled game with digitised visuals. Billy Allison and I weren't enamoured of the whole idea, so we figured that we had to do something to highlight the issues, but in a positive way. One Tuesday night we went back to my place and sketched up all the most ridiculous cartoons of what you could do with a stick, disregarding the dimensions and even considering that the stick was actually sentient – so it could do things for you, including finding its way back to you.

The ideas were ridiculous. We presented them to Jeremy Smith (head of Core) expecting to be laughed out of the room. Our plan backfired – the drawings went down so well that we then spent the best part of the next year making a game about a man with a stick.

Shellshock was your first experience working with 3D – was it a big step for you?

Mark 'Mac' Avory's sprite scaling engine was used on *Soul Star* for the 32X. It was a question of, 'What more games could we make using Mac's tech?' and that lead to *BC Racers* and *Thunderhawk*. I was asked if I could come up with another game that would use it, with me building the art in preparation for a team to come free and make the game. With racing, helicopters and space being already covered I figured a tank game was a safe bet. After I'd built a whole bunch of tanks I still didn't have a team, so Guy Miller and I came up with a wild backstory that saw a Nineties-era rap-inspired 'A-Team' doing missions around the world. I had lots of fun modelling characters and environments and animating intros.

Did any of the games you worked on at Core end up abandoned and unreleased?

It was a fact of life back then – you'd try something and it wouldn't work, or something wouldn't get past concept stages. The one that stands out most was a 3D sport that I did a stack of art for (think *Speedball* with jet packs on the Amiga, using scaling sprites) with the working title of '*Retro*' (as in retro rockets, not games). A programmer external to Core was developing the game and it was cancelled a few months in (I think there was some disagreement or other), so although I recall being interviewed about it for a magazine, it never surfaced.

Was it a difficult decision to move to Acclaim?

It was one of the best things I ever did. Jason and Darren Falcus saw what I could do and asked me whether I wanted to stick with art or work on design – I decided to go with design because that was the thing that I could see would be most useful. Acclaim had the role of 'designer planner', which was separate to that of a producer (who were more business and budget focused); that meant you did the design and then ran project management. That's what I took on with *College Slam*. The project was already in motion with multiple versions heading off in different directions and running headlong at an extremely tight deadline. I came up with a plan to bring all the designs together and then ran around for weeks with checklists, making sure that everyone on the team had what they needed or just made sure they kept talking. It was quite an exhilarating change.

> "I'm privileged to have had the opportunity to do all manner of unexpected things"
> Simon Phipps

Shadow Man was a big project, did it take a lot of work?

It sure did! Acclaim Teesside went from a 2D conversion house to taking on a massively ambitious 3D adventure. We likely had bitten off much more than we could chew, but we sure took a good shot at it.

I started as designer planner but eventually elected to relinquish the planner part to my friend, Nick Bagley. That was a decision I made after a particularly weird afternoon coming up with cool design ideas for the game and then working out how much work it would take to do them. That took me to a strange place where it felt like the best plan was not to make a game at all, because that took the least amount of resources. I spoke to Nick the following day about taking on project management. For the rest of the project, we had a great time working together, negotiating the balance of all the elements that made up the game.



» [PlayStation] Simon performed motion capture and gave his voice to Jack The Ripper in *Shadow Man*.

You lent your voice and motion capture performance to characters in the _Shadow Man_ games, do you enjoy that?

I love it. I'm just so privileged to have had the opportunity to do all manner of unexpected things as a result of my job. Along the way it's meant that I've done voice work and put on the mocap suit. I got to voice Jack the Ripper from reading through the script with my buddy Guy – I put on my best Bob Hoskins just for fun during the readthrough and Guy said that I should take the part.

YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

Take over while we play a game of Burnout, RG readers

THE LAIRD: Which of your franchises would you most like to bring back and why?

None of them. They reflected where I was and what I was doing at a time, and having lived through making them I'm happy to leave them where they are. I'm more interested on what's around the corner, what new things I can learn and what new things I can create. That said, I feel privileged that folks remember the games that I've worked on, let alone drop me a line asking questions about them after all of these years.

ERIC: Were you happy with how the new *GoldenEye* turned out?

The game changed course mid-development when *Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* came out and there was a massive push to up the amount of set-pieces, firefights and destruction. We'd initially spec'd the game as more stealthy and tactical, but I'm pleased how all of the first-person action turned out – doing the brutal melee takedowns through Bond's eyes was something we'd really wanted to do.

MARKOPOLOMAN: In your own opinion, what was the best 8-bit computer?

Had to be the BBC Model B for me – it was just so accessible. The BASIC was lightning-fast and being able to write 6502 Assembler within your code made it easy for me to teach myself how to program. It was easy to mod and the graphics were so colourful. It had some amazing games, such as *Snapper* and *Planetoid*. Although I didn't play them much on account of my two left thumbs and the fact that it took time away from making my own games.

You dabbled in magic with the *Harry Potter* games. Are you a fan of the franchise, and how well did the books translate into a game?

I was bought a copy of the first two books for my 34th birthday by Guy, while I was still at Acclaim. I must admit, I enjoyed their sweet, very 'English', classic kids' adventure style. What I didn't realise was that only a few short months later that Guy and I would be at Electronic Arts breaking ground on their *Harry Potter* series. That was the start of five years throwing myself wholeheartedly into the books, and all the trivia and fiction surrounding them.

When we arrived at EA in October 2000 the first games were in production. External teams were at full speed making games to come out in time with the movie. Guy and I had to say 'no' to some of the more offbeat ideas – ultimately they would be shown to JK Rowling and we understood she wanted the games to reflect her vision. We stepped in where necessary to suggest alternatives when the teams had gotten off-track, and with the GBA game [we] pretty much redesigned it to guarantee it would come out on time.

What design elements did you end up bringing to *Harry Potter*?

Once those initial games were done we focused on *Chamber Of Secrets* – developed internally at EA. We did our best to create a fully-explorable Hogwarts that was true to the novels, with all of the details we could manage. We carried that through into *Prisoner Of Azkaban*. When we got to *Goblet Of Fire*, we were specifically tasked by marketing to make the game three-player, and feature a mechanic where the characters could combine their spells in the most epic ways imaginable. This precluded making a free-roaming adventure and while *Goblet Of Fire* looked better than its prequels, we went back to making an explorable Hogwarts for *Order Of The Phoenix* after fans expressed their disappointment that the exploration aspect had been taken away.

The arrival of each book would see me hunched over it for two straight days, taking copious notes and calling out references to make sure what we were doing in the games still held true. I moved over to Criterion during development of *Order Of The Phoenix* and so was able to read the final books as a fan once more. When I finished the last chapter, I was done. I've not been in a rush to watch any *Potter* movies or read any books since.



» [Wii] Simon designed the all-new tank levels for *GoldenEye* on the Wii.



» Enemy designs for *Switchblade*.

You wrote a lot of dialogue for the games, was that a challenge to make it authentic?

I really enjoyed the challenge. It meant pacing up and down in my kitchen doing my best (terrible) Alan Rickman and Robbie Coltrane impressions and writing the dialogue from there. I also had assistance from Guy, who wrote the early scripts before I took on the later ones. Guy acted as script editor for me, making tweaks before the scripts were sent to JK Rowling. We could never get the spelling of Hagrid's dialogue correct – the author has a very specific way that she writes his West Country accent and so we always expected to be corrected on that one! I just hope no-one at EA has me voicing the temporary tracks for the scripts – I can

» Simon's career has seen him progress from the BBC Micro to VR games.



> "Alex Ward gave me a call and asked me if I wanted to switch wands for cars"
> Simon Phipps



» [C64] Simon worked on the graphics and design for *Saint & Greavsie*.

manage a reasonably passable Hagrid, but let's just say nobody needs to hear my Emma Watson or Dame Maggie Smith!

How did you join Criterion and the *Burnout* series?
I've known Alex Ward since my Acclaim days. Shortly after EA bought Criterion, he gave me a call and asked me if I wanted to switch wands for cars. After many years with the boy wizard that was a welcome change. I worked on the Burnout Paradise Network, which was the website/live front end for *Burnout*, along with doing all manner of promotional and support work on the website and video podcast.

You presented episodes of *Burnout's Crash TV* series – are you a natural presenter?
I've always felt comfortable speaking on camera or in public (as long as I know what it is I'm talking about), so when Alex said to me and Jez Chubb, 'We should do a video podcast to support *Burnout*,'' we leapt in with both feet and just got on with it. Making *Crash TV* was yet another fun thing the games industry gave me the opportunity to have a go at. My favourite was the Halloween episode we did where the guys agreed we should do a parody of *Resident Evil*. I have some wonderfully surreal photos of our zombie team sitting eating sandwiches and playing *Burnout* between takes, and it was dead cool pretending to blow zombies away with a sawn-off shotgun!

You worked on the *GoldenEye* revival for Wii, how did you view the console?
The hardware was really underpowered compared to the other consoles that were around at the time (and we were trying to compete with those), and the motion controls didn't do the code guys any favours – it was all on them to decode the noisy outputs from the controller to fake the illusion of it being smooth and accurate. Working seven days a week, 12 to 14 hours a day, from the very start of January through to the final day in September [and] we finally finished. I handed in my notice the day after.



» [PC] *Lethal VR* plays like a shooting gallery, with cartoon cutouts.

You followed ex-Criterion staff over to Three Fields Entertainment. Is it very different working with a smaller team compared to the big studios?
It is an entirely different and wonderfully liberating experience. We're a tiny team of great friends, and everyone has multiple skills which mean that everyone works on the game, contributing in multiple ways. I get to design, code, draw art both for in-game and promotional work and thanks to great tools and a great team can make changes to anything I want in a fraction of the time that it would take on a big team.

Best of all, we have no one that we have to ask for permission to make a game. In a big organisation, you're always having to ask for permission, and an army of folks whose job it is to control every word you say. It's stifling. It means you can't take risks, talk to your fans or just make a game because you have a cool idea – you have to seek approval every time.

***Dangerous Golf* has the destructive flavour of *Burnout*. Who came up with it?**
You can thank Alex Ward for that, he'd always wanted to make a minigolf game but if you know anything of Alex's games the first thing he's going to do is turn the rulebook on its head, and maybe set fire to it, and explode it. It's such fun to make games this way.

Three Fields is working with virtual reality with *Lethal VR*. What is different about working with this technology?
In virtual reality, [graphics] need to be readable and recognisable as interface elements positioned eight to ten feet away from you in imaginary space. That coupled with the (relative lack of) resolution of VR displays means you really have to work at making your text and imagery as clear as possible.

Although I absolutely love virtual reality, I do worry that the simple barrier of putting a box on your head is going to stop it from hitting the mainstream. I sincerely hope that I'm wrong – showing my 87-year-old mum dinosaurs on the Oculus Rift was one of the best things I did last year.

Did you ever think you would still be working on games now?
I'm grateful that I've been able to do what I love for so long. When I got the offer from Gremlin Derby I was working as a programmer on business software, it was a pay cut and back then the idea of getting paid to make games was unheard of. My wife Jayne (my fiancée at the time) agreed that we should 'give it a go', thinking that if it all went wrong I could return to making business software. That 'go' has lasted three decades and I'd like to think it will continue into another decade.

Thanks to Terry Lloyd, Simon and simonphipps.com for images – you can follow Simon on Twitter at @simorph.

A FUNNY OLD GAME

Simon recalls a strange licence

Saint & Greavsie was unusual – a computer version of a trivia board game, endorsed by ITV's famous football pundits. "I remember us being asked if we wanted to do two football projects (none of the team was into sports) or a scrolling beat-'em-up based on the 'Guardian Angels' for Gremlin. We all wanted to do the football ones since we knew they'd be more profitable. It took ten weeks to finish, on five formats."

Simon recalls the final day. "It was 5pm on the day before I got married, and my then-fiancée, now wife, Jayne was stood beside me making sure there was no possibility of any overrunning! The following day we got married and as our evening celebration started, Greg Holmes and the rest of the boys from Core grabbed the microphone and announced that they had a gift for us to ensure a good time on our honeymoon. My heart sank as in front of a huge crowd they handed me a large, heavy box. My brain was in a whirl as I tried to come up with something witty in the face of something embarrassing… they'd gift-wrapped the *Saint & Greavsie* board game."



Dungeon Explorer

WHY AREN'T YOU HELPING ME?

RETROREVIVAL

» PC ENGINE » 1989 » ATLUS

It turns out that I'm a bit of an asshole when it comes to playing multiplayer games. "Why are you running off? Why aren't you helping me? Why are you stealing all that gold?" enquired Sam as I powered through the first stage of *Dungeon Explorer*, leaving him to mop up my mistakes and deal with a never-ending supply of monsters that I hadn't bothered to kill. "Don't be an idiot, you're going to die," he told me many times. 'But I'm rich," came my arrogant reply. And I was right. In fact, we were both right.

I first encountered *Dungeon Explorer* in my local import shop on its original release and in all that time since I first encountered it I still haven't learned how to play nicely. Atlus' game wasn't the most original of concepts, but being able to explore a *Gauntlet*-styled dungeon with up to four other friends certainly was. Fuelled by numerous RPG mechanics, like different classes, an overworld to navigate and numerous NPCs to interact with, it felt quite different on its original release and it still holds up today.

Initially, Sam and I chose the Bard and Elf respectively, but we soon died, getting overpowered by the dungeon's denizens (they're best used in bigger parties). Of course, it didn't help that I was sodding off to grab the treasure, leaving Sam's puny Bard to take on dangerous-looking skeletons and icky gelatinous blobs. After a quick reset of the Retro Freak we came up with a new resolution and decided to pick far more sensible classes. I'd be a Fighter and Sam was a Warlock. We also decided to work together so we could defeat the evil boss we'd failed to previously best. With new resolve we entered the dungeon once again.

"You're a bloody tank, Darran! Stop acting like you're the only one playing the game and come and help me with these bloody monsters." I guess old habits are hard to break.





>> This month we revist Crash Bandicoot and Final Fantasy XII, give our views on the latest Pikmin and Micro Machines games and find out if Castlevania is worth watching on Netflix



» [PS4] The ripple effects show off the graphical flair added by Vicarious Visions in the remake.

Crash Bandicoot: N. Sane Trilogy

OFTEN N. JOYABLE, OCCASIONALLY N. FURIATING

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS4
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £34.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION
- » **DEVELOPER:** VICARIOUS VISIONS
- » **PLAYERS:** 1



We've always remembered the original PlayStation *Crash Bandicoot* games fondly – but that's largely because our memories aren't faultless. That's not a knock against the original platformers, far from it. It's just an admission that for every memorable piece of background music, there was a nightmarishly difficult piece of level design that we've repressed. For every cool set piece, an outrageous time trial goal. For every great cartoon villain, a stray nitro crate that would inevitably kill you. The *Crash Bandicoot* games were fun, but they were certainly never easy, and that's something that a lot of people tend to forget.

That difficulty certainly returns in this trilogy of remakes, but so does everything that gamers of the mid-Nineties lapped up. Three console generations on, Vicarious Visions needed to remake almost everything from the ground up, from character models to background graphics, music and even the game physics. The developer has aimed to keep the games authentic while adding embellishments where the technology allows. This means that the games still employ linear pathways rather than fully-roaming 3D stages, with Crash running into the screen or from left to right as the situation dictates.

For the most part, Vicarious Visions' attempts to maintain authenticity work wonders. The three games bundled in the *N. Sane Trilogy* look as good as you'd hope they would on PS4 while still capturing the spirit of the original games. Nothing has transformed beyond recognition, and the cartoonish charm that captivated players is still there in spades. It's just all rendered with a modern sheen – Crash is a distinctively furry marsupial this time around, sunlight reflects off the water, and those bouncy mushrooms don't look hexagonal any more. The music is also noticeably upgraded over the original PlayStation sound chip fare, while still being lovingly familiar to the ear.

» [PS4] Old tricks, like running the ropes in Road To Nowhere, still work just fine.





BRIEF HISTORY

» Crash Bandicoot made his debut in 1996, and was quickly adopted by PlayStation owners as the hardware's platform game mascot. The success of the original game inspired two highly successful sequels and a racing spinoff before original developers Naughty Dog moved on. This compilation includes the three PlayStation platform games.

✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH



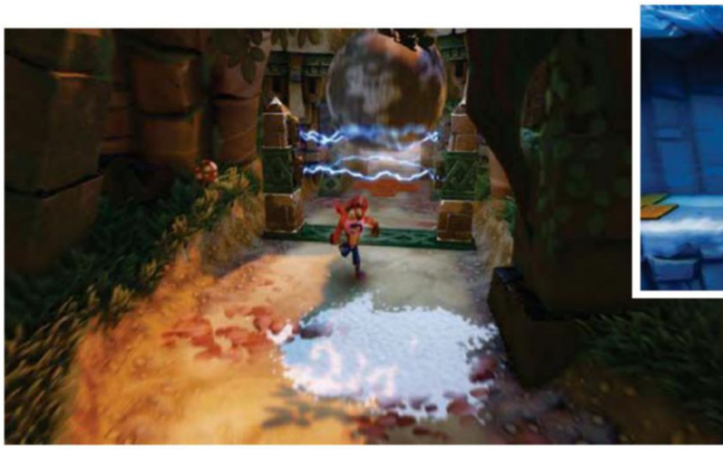
DARRAN
Kirby's Blowout Blast
It might be an expanded minigame, but it's one that's tremendously fun to play.



DREW
Final Fantasy XII: The Zodiac Age
14-year-old Drew didn't like *FFXII* on its release. 14-year-old Drew was stupid, and had dumb hair.



NICK
Puyo Puyo Tetris
Other games briefly distracted me, but seeing Evo convinced me that my skills need work.



» [PS4] The cartoonish expression on Crash's face is a great reminder of why he was such a hit in the Nineties.



» [PS4] All the classic death animations are back, and you'll get plenty of lives if you want to enjoy them.





Level designs are recreated with such accuracy that if you remember the original games, it's trivial to pick up the new game, and this is because one of the few elements Vicarious Visions did use was Naughty Dog's original level geometry. Where improvements have been made, they fit into the existing mould well – for example, the chase levels where Crash runs towards the player now feature indicators on the floor to alert players to upcoming dash pads. Time trial features introduced in the third game have also been extended to the first two, and Crash's sister, Coco, is now an unlockable character.

While the remaster work is generally of a high quality, we couldn't help but think that even though the *Crash Bandicoot* games were hard, they weren't always *this* hard – so we pulled out the originals to check. Sure enough, the old games actually proved to be easier. Collision detection with enemies is less forgiving in the remakes, and jumps are harder to make. In one specific instance in the *Crash Bandicoot 2* level Crash Dash, we discovered a gap where a slide jump was required, as a regular jump no longer cleared it as it had in the original. It's disappointing that these remakes, which are faithful in most regards, suffer from these problems – we suspect that despite being very minor technical differences, the fact that they tend to determine whether Crash lives or dies amplifies their impact.

There's also the quality of the original games to consider. While the *Crash Bandicoot* games were considered to be top-tier platform games at the time of their release, they suffer a little on reassessment. The pick of the bunch is *Crash Bandicoot 2: Cortex Strikes Back*, which builds on the best bits of the original game by adding new moves and level themes, and adds a non-linear level selection system that greatly reduces the frustration of discovering a tough stage. Surprisingly, we felt that the weakest game of the bunch was the third. Though the addition of various vehicular stages provided a welcome injection of variety, the execution wasn't always great – the motorbike stages handle terribly and others like the jet ski aren't much better. The game isn't bad, but it's clear to see the point at which the developers were beginning to run out of ideas to expand the *Crash* formula.

It's hard to deny that *Crash Bandicoot: N. Sane Trilogy* is a good package. There's a generous helping of action for any platform game fanatic here, with dozens of stages and plenty of secrets to discover. If you're determined to hunt down every last crate and take down all the time trials, it'll last for ages. The fact that it's all been remastered to a modern standard is awesome, too. But this isn't a package for the impatient and easily frustrated, thanks to the difficulty of the original games being compounded by the minor physics changes introduced by the remakes. With the benefit of direct comparison, we feel that the changes aren't ruinous but they are noticeable, and we suspect that while hardcore purists and speedrunners will find that enough to ruin the whole thing, most players will agree with us and have fun with the games. ✱

In a nutshell

Frustrating inconsistencies turn an otherwise excellent remaster project into one that's just good, but it's still a collection of three great platformers that can provide hours of fun.

>> Score **78%**

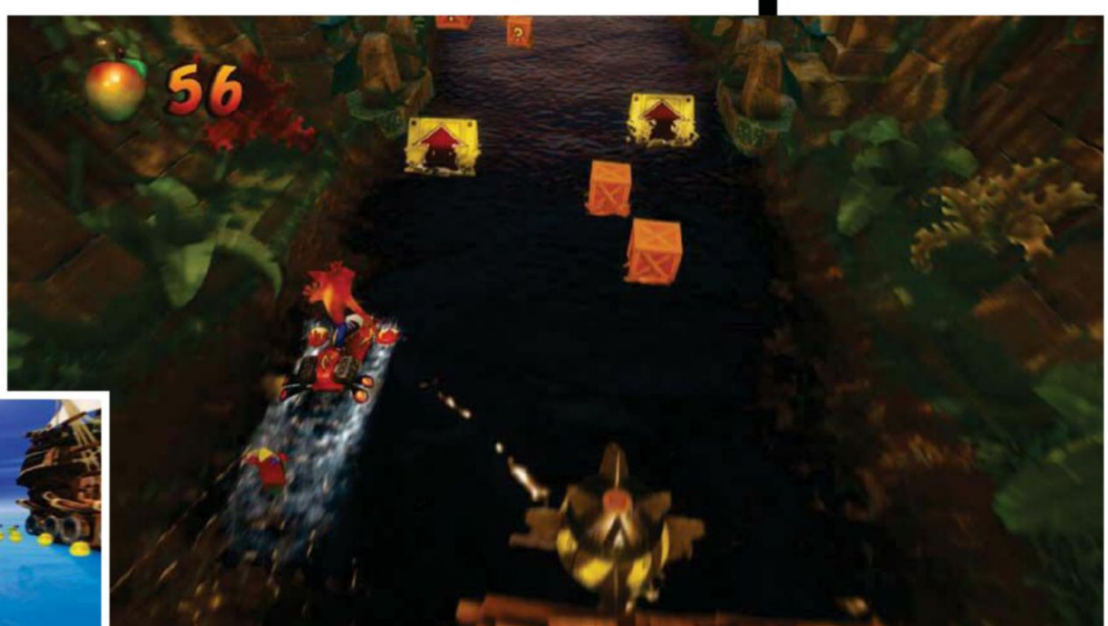
✱ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
CRASH BANDICOOT 2 (PLAYSTATION)

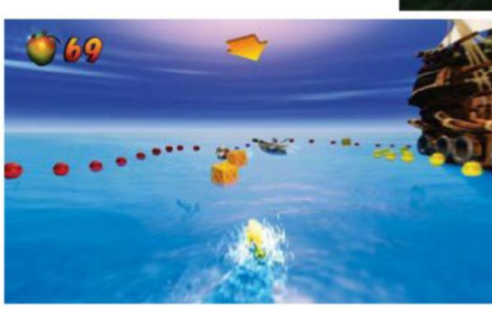


▼ SOMETHING NEW
RATCHET & CLANK (PS4)





» [PS4] This jet-propelled board is nice and speedy, but a bit of a pain to control.



Hey! Pikmin

» System: 3DS **» Buy it for:** £34.99 **» Buy it from:** Online, retail

Those of you who are craving a traditional *Pikmin* experience are going to be disappointed with *Hey! Pikmin,* as it's a fair simpler affair. Worry not, though, for while it lacks the depth and strategy that has always been prevalent in the home versions of Nintendo's game, *Hey! Pikmin* is far from a disappointment.

Coded by Arzest, *Hey! Pikmin* dispenses with the real-time strategy of the earlier games and plays more like a 2.5D platformer with puzzle elements. Controlling Captain Olimar, you must navigate the gorgeous looking environments in search of the rare material Sparklium, which is needed to power your downed ship – new abilities will also be unlocked for your craft as you collect specific amounts of Sparklium. Pikmin can be summoned with a quick blow of your whistle and each different coloured Pikmin has unique abilities that must be called on as you make your way through the game world. Olimar himself has a handy jet pack ability that allows him to reach certain areas or clear dangerous hazards, but it's, of course, limited in its use.

There are plenty of puzzles featured throughout *Hey! Pikmin*, but for the most part they're exceptionally simple, typically requiring little more than to have a set amount of Pikmin in order to solve it. Things do start to get a little more convoluted on the later stages of the game, but it's never too taxing on your brain, allowing you to simply enjoy the charming personalities of the Pikmin as they rush their way across the screen looking for collectible goodies to boost your ever-expanding Sparklium supply.

The tiny nature of your Pikmin means that using the 3DS touchscreen and stylus combo can be a little hit and miss at times, but in general the controls are surprisingly tight. The design of the levels rewards exploration as there are all sorts of goodies to be found off the beaten path, while encounters with bosses are well-thought-out and full of character. Ultimately, *Hey! Pikmin* is a decent platforming experience that's boosted by buckets of charm and slick presentation.

>> Score **70%**





» [3DS] You'll need to use your Pikmin to build bridges so you can continue your progress on certain stages.

» [3DS] Discarded items, like scissors, are rich in Sparklium so seek them all out.



Micro Machines: World Series

» System: PS4 (tested) Xbox One, PC
» Buy it for: £24.99 **» Buy it from:** Online, retail

Nostalgia can be a powerful tool, but nostalgia alone can't make a poor game good. Take the latest *Micro Machines* for example, it features some wonderful nods to both the franchise and company's past, but there's about it. The single-player mode is virtually non-existent, with the focus on disappointing multiplayer races that fail to capture the excitement of the earlier games. The biggest issue is that the handling is terrible, killing the game's pace. We can forgive the blatant reuse of tracks from *Toybox Turbos*, because the design of them is genuinely great, but the sluggish handling of the vehicles kills any memories you have of the frantic racing found in the original games. A real missed opportunity.

>> Score **45%**



Final Fantasy XII: The Zodiac Age

» System: PS4 **» Buy it for:** £39.99
» Buy it from: Online, retail

We often talk about which games have aged well. And looking back on *Final Fantasy XII*, we've realised it is like Keanu Reeves in that it seemingly hasn't aged at all.

Some of the criticisms of the original, mainly its lacklustre story, still stand today, however *The Zodiac Age* is substantially less grindy thanks to the option to speed the game up to two or even four times its original speed. It makes the game so much friendlier to revisit, and we'd like to see similar options appear in more JRPG remasters.

The inclusion of the new Job system is also a massive boon, letting you create more focused roles for your party. There hasn't been a better tine to revisit this RPG classic.

>> Score **87%**



Cave Story+

» System: Switch (Tested) **» Buy it for:** £26.99
» Buy it from: eShop

Cave Story quickly became a favourite of ours when we discovered its fan translation back in the mid-Noughties, and this enhanced edition reminds us exactly why we fell in love with it to begin with. The game is a retro-styled platform adventure that takes major cues from *Metroid*, but mixes cute fluffy animals into the ongoing terror. Level design is strong and the weapons are interesting and varied, plus there are plenty of secrets to find. Three alternate versions of the soundtrack are available in place of the original, all of which have their merits, but you can't yet exchange the subtly remastered visuals for the originals (though a patch is promised, as is one for a two-player mode). If you want the best version of this indie classic, this is the one to get.

>> Score **89%**

PICK OF THE MONTH

Castlevania (Netflix series)

A decent adaptation brutally cut short

Interest in a *Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse* adaptation has been circling Hollywood since Frederator Studios acquired the rights in 2007. Now, a decade later, we've finally been treated to the very first animated adaptation of the hit videogame series and it's surprisingly decent.

Some will find it hard to accept Trevor Belmont (brilliantly voiced by Richard Armitage) as a hard-drinking asshole, but character development has never been a strong point of the game series, so it's good to see he's not some infallible, perfect hero and has some depth to him. The actors playing Dracula, Alucard and Sypha Belnades are all on point as well, fleshing out the relatively sketchy original NES creations, and it's only some of the minor players who act like they've accidentally wandered into an episode of *Carry On Castlevania*.

Speaking of humour, there's a surprising amount of it in *Castlevania*, but much of it falls flat. Esteemed comic book writer Warren Ellis admitted that he had no knowledge of the series prior to be approached to write it and it shows in some of the show's misplaced laughs. Humour isn't the only issue, the motivations of characters aren't always clear, either. The relationship between Dracula and his wife feels undercooked, for example; rapidly moving forwards to the events that trigger the situation Trevor Belmont finds himself in, but never really highlighting why he feels so anguished.

Fortunately, the action scenes save *Castlevania* and while they're not as frequent as we'd like, they easily capture the spirit of old anime classics like *Ninja Scroll* and highlight just how dangerous Trevor Belmont is. The brutal beatings highlight the distinct art style and have a nice frenetic feel to them. It is certainly graphic in places, but it never feels gratuitous and it ramps up nicely as the quadrilogy progresses.

It's a shame, then, that just as *Castlevania* starts to get going it abruptly stops, leaving it feeling like a film that's been brutally cut in half. It's frustrating, because while *Castlevania* is very generic in places, it's one of the best videogame adaptations we've seen (although that's not too high a bar to clear) and it does set itself up nicely for a second series (which has already been announced). A surprisingly entertaining watch that's fun while it lasts.



» As well as some lovely hand-drawn animation there's plenty of fan service in *Castlevania*, including a face-off with Trevor and Alucard.



» *Castlevania* does a good job of capturing the spirit of the original games, with an interesting selection of monsters for Trevor to battle.

Gamers HOMEBREW

Brewing since 2005



» [Web browser] So, which witch is which again?

Gaming NEWS

CYAN, MAGENTA AND WHITE

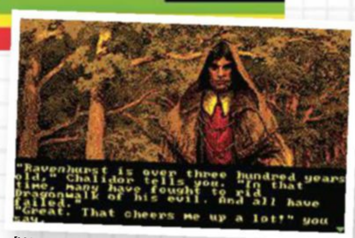
Readers who reminisce about the early days of PC gaming might find the recent CGA Jam interesting. Although there weren't any specific rules about resolution, developers were tasked with creating a game using CGA colour palettes with a theme selected from the four on offer which were, 'history repeats', 'always faster', 'gravity' and 'Wild West/ *Westworld*'. That led to over a hundred entries, so we'll just look at a few which grabbed our attention for one reason or another.

Old-school adventure game fans might want to give *Golden Sword Of Dragonwalk* a try since it's a mouse-driven, digitised version of RL Stine's *Choose Your Own Adventure* book of the same name which begins in an old house but soon travels through a dimensional portal to another world. *CGAdventure* is also fantasy-based but more a role-playing game with three-dimensional mazes to explore, mysterious characters to talk to and enemies to fight, while there is top-down exploration in the visually impressive *Tiny Frontier Saga* where Sheriff Boone must rescue his beloved Amanda from bandits.

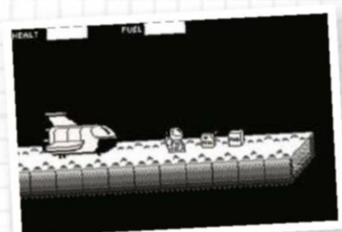
Fans of shoot-'em-ups also have some variety: we particularly liked *Witch-'Em-Up*, a horizontal cute-'em-up where a broom-riding sorceress must blast her way through all manner of supernatural nasties and their projectiles. There's also *Floppy D!sk* where weapons are used to fight both enemies and gravity – so each shot fired pushes the player in the opposite direction and shooting downwards keeps them in the air – while *DarkBlaster* is a twin-stick shooter which is procedurally generated.

The horizontally-scrolling *Terminal Limit* is an action game where the craft gets faster and faster over time in order to make it more difficult to avoid hazards. And if 3D racing seems like an appealing idea, both *Radiant Horizon* and *Gravity Racer* are a little like how *WipEout* would have looked had it been written several years earlier, and if CGA computers of the time were more powerful.

Some of the games are prototypes – as is usually the case with these time-limited competitions – but all of the competition's entries can be found at Kikstart.eu/cga-jam-2017 and we're sure that most gamers will find something that will amuse them, even if it's a slightly odd combination of tower defence and idle games, in the vein of *Clicker Heroes,* which is *Idle Defense* or an absolutely terrible pun, like the name *Pwny Xpress*.



» [Windows] *Life and soul,* you are.



» [Windows] "You have ability to form and transmit thought energy far beyond the norm."

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at: **darran.jones@futurenet.com**



» [Game Boy Color] Fans of *Sim City* are going to enjoy this new Game Boy Color release.

HEAVEN SENT

Game Boy Color release *µCity* is a worldbuilding game similar to the venerable *SimCity*. The objective is to manage and expand your metropolis while keeping all of its residents happy and not running out of money in the process. That also involves managing power, transportation and occasionally dealing with disasters like fires or even nuclear meltdowns.

Players can start either from a randomly generated map or using one of the predefined scenarios and some of the features can be tweaked or disabled from the options screen. Kikstart.eu/ucity-gbc will take you there.

"µCity is a world building game similar to the venerable SimCity"



» [MSX] Build up an army and lead them on to victory.

HELL BENT

Staying with the god game theme for a moment, if building a city and dealing with the issues raised from that setup doesn't sound like an interesting proposition then there's always the option of controlling a small army and leading them straight into battle, as you do on *Motkonqe* for the MSX.

The player can't directly control individual troops, so, instead, they can use their cursor to leave markers to say where they should be heading or manipulate the environment to make those journeys easier. Set a destination marker down at Kikstart.eu/motkonqe-msx for more information.

HOMEBREW HEROES

We initially thought that Shaun Bebbington had bought a pet snake for his daughter. When we understood that he'd written a Commodore PET game called PET Snake with her, we decided to find out more



THE BIG INTERVIEW
Shaun Bebbington

Where did the idea for your game *PET Snake* initially come from?

Programming with my daughter really. She likes BASIC and has a load of ideas to make games. She wants to be the best games developer ever, even better than Graz Richards, so I thought I'd encourage her.

Her ideas for improvements include adding in a fairy to the proceedings, though I'm not sure how I'd do that.

And what drew you to developing for the Commodore PET specifically?

I am unable to develop in machine language or other low-level languages. These things are much more difficult than people think. So BASIC. I figured that I could possibly get some playability out of the Commodore PET because its BASIC is slightly faster than that of the Commodore 64. Plus I like the Commodore PET a lot.



» [PET] It's easy to become tied up in knots while not eating your own body.



» [PET] Starting off small, but it'll get bigger in no time.

Where there any standout moments during the development of *PET Snake*?

The only real moment was when I made a typo on the title screen. Graz Richards' Monument MicroGames was mistyped to "Monumental MicroGames"; I'm good at typos. Very good.

What kind of feedback have you had so far from PET gamers?

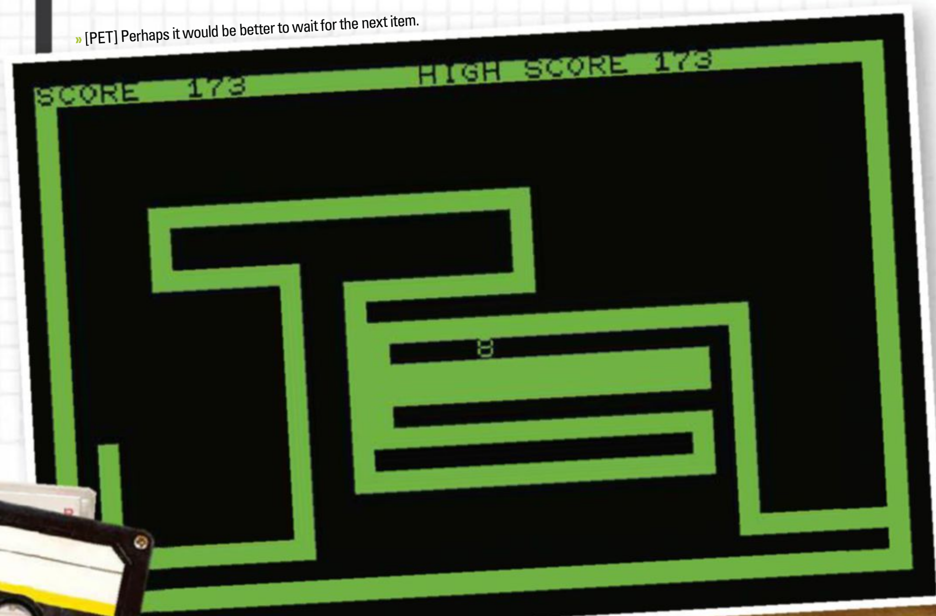
At least one person on LinkedIn liked it. Generally, though, feedback doesn't happen so anything more than zero would count as a resounding success story, as far as I'm concerned.

And, finally, can you tell us which projects you're currently working on?

At the moment, I need a new laptop as my current one has gone to silicon heaven with all of the dead toasters and microwaves. Oddly enough, though, I have a working Commodore PET – 3032 'Professional Computer', innit? – which is working. So, I think Commodore wins over Sony for longevity.

I have some ZX80 and ZX81 games that I'm working on, again to be published through Monument MicroGames. Again, these developments are driven by my daughter as she likes programming in BASIC, on machines like the ZX80 and ZX81. Yes, even with the alleged keyboard on those supposed personal computers. So I need to finish my ZX80 game – which is a *Hang Man* type thing – then I'm going to make a maze game (I can make both without a modern-day PC as I save these to cassette directly using powerful Sinclair BASIC). Oh, and I may as well make *PET Snake* for the VIC-20. It'd be rude not to.

» [PET] Perhaps it would be better to wait for the next item.

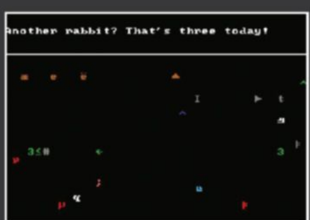


Gaming REVIEWS

DO YOU REMEMBER?

Zen simulation *robotfindskitten* tells the story where a robot finds itself in search of a kitten. To complicate matters there are all manner of unusual items which aren't a kitten like the missing chapter from *A Clockwork Orange*, an ugly bowling trophy or the place where Henry Winkler was sick in 1962. None of these items hinder the mission or are fatal to the robot, although some may look at it in a disapproving manner.

This game has been around for a couple of decades with the oldest version being for POSIX, but there are conversions for a wide range of computers and consoles including the Dreamcast, Atari 2600 or DOS alongside more recent platforms such as HTML5 and Scratch. For everything to do with robots finding kittens head to robotfindskitten.org



» [Atari 7800] *Robotfindskitten* has now been converted to countless different platforms.



» [Amiga] A roll of copper wire on the Amiga, geddit? Oh, please yourselves.





» [C64] Stalactites go down, stalagmites go up... or is it the other way around?

ABU SIMBEL PROFANATION

» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE 64 » **DEVELOPER:** EQUINOXE » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/ABU-SIMBEL-C64 » **PRICE:** FREE

For over three millennia the Abu Simbel temple in Egypt has managed to keep all of its secrets safe from prying, avaricious eyes. Most of the world's top explorers have at some point entered in search of untold hidden riches and priceless artefacts, but every single one has disappeared without a trace. The next adventurer to step up to the temple's doorway is Johnny Jones, a rotund young gentleman who plans to be the first person to retrieve the riches within the tomb and return to civilization. But this isn't an easy task, since there are deadly creatures patrolling the corridors, sealed areas which require keys and deadly traps to kill him, should he put a foot in the wrong place.

Three decades after the release of Victor Ruiz's *Abu Simbel Profanation* for the Spectrum Amstrad CPC and MSX computers from publisher Dinamic, a conversion to the C64 has been put together. A few of the cosmetic details have been pared down a little – for example, the barriers that previously slid gracefully out of the way on the other versions now flash different colours before disappearing– and it doesn't really take advantage of the C64's hardware, avoiding colour clash between the player and enemies, but on the gameplay front it's very close to the original so is unrelentingly and frustratingly difficult.

There is a huge amount of trial and error involved so, although a seemingly generous ten Johnnies are dished out at the beginning, there are many places where the game expects very accurate manoeuvring which, when combined with very strict collision detection, will rapidly deplete the lives counter. There are also some, quite frankly, evil spike pits where our hero can become stuck in a death loop, being repeatedly resurrected and fatally skewered until there aren't any lives left.

Fans of challenging, masocore platform action or indeed of the Z80-based versions of this game may enjoy *Abu Simbel Profanation* but it certainly isn't for everybody and the C64 already has a solid collection of platformers available to choose from.

>> Score **67%**



» [C64] Caught between a rock, a hard place and a very deadly spider.



» [C64] A relentless difficult level means that *Abu Simbel Profanation* certainly isn't for everyone.

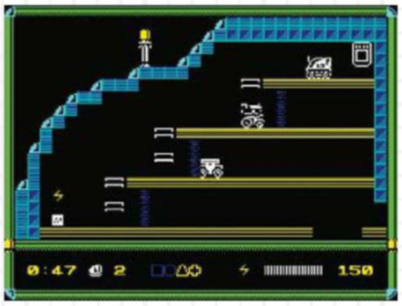


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ROBOT 1 IN THE SHIP OF DOOM

» **FORMAT:** SINCLAIR SPECTRUM » **PRICE:** FREE
» **DEVELOPER:** MAT RECARDO
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/SHIP-DOOM-SPEC

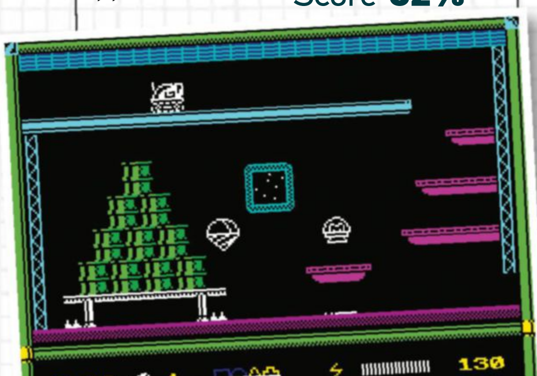


» [ZX Spectrum] The boy who made slaves out of men that's me.

Robot 1 is the only sentient being aboard a spacecraft that's a mere five minutes away from oblivion, left to perish by the crew as they strapped themselves hastily into the life pods. The only remaining way to reach safety is to search the ship for the keys which activate the emergency teleporter, avoiding contact with some far less intelligent patrolling droids and creatures who don't seem to be particularly worried about their impending doom and are fatal to the touch.

There's not much time to pause for thought aboard the Ship Of Doom because, while five minutes might sound like a generous time limit, it passes remarkably quickly in this case. Dashing around in a desperate search for the final key or racing to the teleporter when there's less than a minute remaining becomes even more panic-inducing as the game starts to tick with each second as a reminder.

>> Score **82%**



» [ZX Spectrum] Time is the biggest enemy for Robot 1 aboard the Ship Of Doom.

VOID QUEST

» **FORMAT:** WINDOWS » **DEVELOPER:** ICEFALL GAMES » **PRICE:** FREE
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/VOID-QUEST-WIN

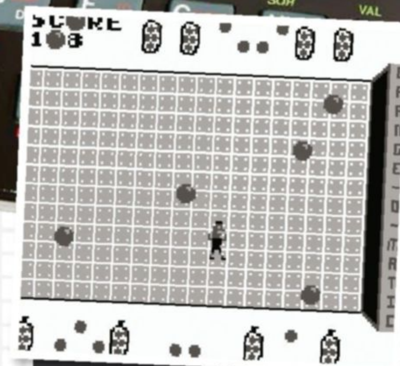
Life in the wilderness is simple, or at least it should be until the hermit-like character in *Void Quest* finally decides to get around to ripping up an old tree stump with his faithful tractor, only to see it fall into a pit from which strange lights and noises will sometimes be emitted. What's causing those eerie sounds and are they associated with the couple next door scarpering a few months previously or the mysterious postcard in his mailbox?

The inspirations for *Void Quest* are, quite obviously, Sierra's *Quest* titles even down to the hybrid user interface which employs a mixture of mouse clicks, keyboard shortcuts and typed instructions such as 'open door' or 'examine truck'. The story isn't particularly long but is unusual enough to hold the attention and solving the rather devious puzzles will take some lateral thinking, just like the ones we'd expect to find in a Sierra adventure.

>> Score **80%**

» [Windows] How not to win friends even if it does influence people.





ROUNDUP

The name is rather unwieldy, but the recently released *Spyders C64 – Chapter 1* is a *Space Invaders* clone with arachnid overtones. The player's gun base sits at the bottom of the playfield while the eight-legged invaders trudge relentlessly left and right across it, pausing to move downwards when they reach one of the borders. Head to Kikstart.eu/spyders-c64.

Readers with arachnophobia might instead be drawn towards the in-progress Game Boy title *Oranges*, where the hero, Bob, finds himself standing in front of a huge 'Orange-O-Matic' machine which has gone haywire to the point of sending giant versions of the fruit in his direction. There are also bananas which give a score bonus and forks which temporarily change things around so Bob can eat oranges rather than getting bowled over by them. Kikstart.eu/oranges-gb will take you there.

BLIMPGEDDON

» **FORMAT:** SINCLAIR SPECTRUM » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/BLIMPGEDDON-SPEC
» **DEVELOPER:** ULTRANARWHAL » **PRICE:** FREE

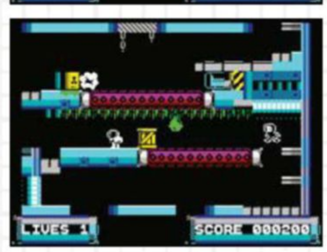
Smart technology was always a bad idea and the Internet Of Things led to what would ultimately become sentient refrigerators. Now they've formed an army under the rule of their Chill Overlord and the first targets are the world's ice cream factories using a fleet of blimps because, apparently, there's no point in trying to make sense of a fridge's plans to take over the planet.

Our hero must defeat this coldhearted scheme by running, jumping and occasionally swimming through machine-filled screens while avoiding the defences. They're also armed with explosive devices which detonate after a set time that have been disguised as yellow rubber ducks; the blast will kill the player, but they'll also act as temporary platforms if needed. The collisions are rather cruel, but most players should soon become acclimatised and using exploding bath toys to save the world from villainous blimp-riding kitchen appliances is silly but fun.

>> Score **84%**



» [ZX Spectrum] There's some pixel perfect jumping to do, but *Blimpgeddon* never feels unfair.



» [ZX Spectrum] The design of *Blimpgeddon* is very nice, with some cool looking environments.







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WIN! Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of either our NES/Master System or SNES/Mega Drive books



STAR LETTER

PROJECTING YOUR RETRO LOVE

Hi there,
Years ago in the Eighties, my girlfriend and I used to go to Sutton in Surrey to see her family and stay the weekend. We used to go shopping on a Saturday in Banstead. This one time I saw a massive projector screen in the local TV outlet. I thought at the time, "I wonder what my C64 Leaderboard would look like on that?" Of course, the price tag put it out of my league, but I could dream.

Now, 30 years later I have realised that dream. Carefully plugging in the RCA leads and loading from tape, the anticipation grew until finally I was playing on an eight-foot screen. Sure enough I was under par after a couple of rounds. What games did I load next? Well it had to be the underrated *Bombjack*, then *Boulder Dash* and *International Karate*. All look incredible.

Thanks for listening to a very content retro gamer.
Bolly Forden



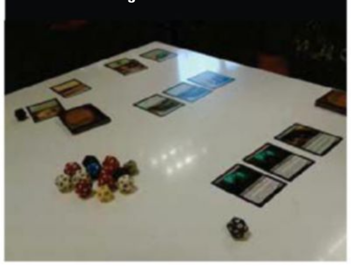
» That's a huge rendition of *Bomb Jack* alright. Bolly Forden's projector setup is quite enviable, isn't it?

We can definitely relate to this dream, Bolly. Gigantic displays are inherently exciting, even when you're hooking up hardware that'll give you pixels the size of Duplo blocks. It's the same reason why we took the Nintendo Classic Mini: NES and immediately hooked it up to a 65-inch TV, and why we'll always play arcade games with ridiculous screens like *Darius*, *Ridge Racer Full Scale* and *Star Wars Battle Pod*. In fact, you've reminded us of something we've wanted to do for a while – we'd like to project a big four-player game of *Mario Kart* on the side of a nearby building, because we're pretty sure we'd get spectators. In any case, enjoy your bookazine.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

The Draft

One afternoon this month, Darran strode into the office with his robe and wizard hat, challenging his underlings to a magical duel! Well, he'd got a box of the latest *Magic: The Gathering* set, which we drafted after work one evening. Conclusion? Wurms and snakes are a deadly combination, and Drew is still hiding under his desk.



SHAMEFUL THRILLS

Hi guys,
Can you please bring back Licence To Thrill and Retro Shamer because they are both rather excellent. Also, how about a readers choice Top 25 for flight simulators from the Eighties? *F19 Stealth Fighter* and *F15 Strike Eagle 2* were awesome.

Thanks for the kickass mag.
Nick Moudios

Hi Nick, cheers for the kind words. Though we didn't have one for a few months, you'll be pleased to find that Licence To Thrill returned last issue and is back again this issue. We plan to keep this part of the magazine going for the foreseeable future, even if it doesn't show up in every issue.

Retro Shamer is less likely to return. Another reader recently brought up the idea of reviving it, but the feedback we received as a result suggested that readers weren't particularly keen on seeing it return. While some enjoyed seeing bad games given a kicking, the majority felt that it felt somewhat meanspirited and that it ran contrary to the magazine's generally positive outlook on gaming.

As for flight simulators, we wouldn't limit ourselves to the Eighties for a top 25, but it's a genre that we'll be sure to keep in mind for the future.



» [Mega Drive] There's nothing better than a good dinosaur fight, as Darran will happily tell you.

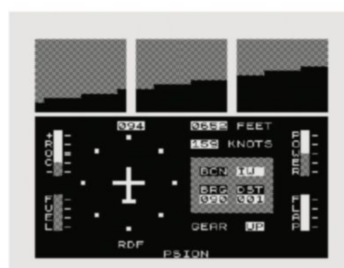
BEAST BATTLER

Hello Darran
Love the magazine. Will you consider *Primal Rage* for a future feature? It was a great beat-'em-up when I was younger. Keep up the great retro gaming goodness.
Dean Russell

The Making Of feature for *Primal Rage* has already appeared in the magazine, way back in issue 83. That's not to say we're finished with the game, mind – there's always the possibility of an Ultimate Guide down the line though, and we'd of course love to get the full story behind the cancelled sequel *Primal Rage 2*.

ELEVENSES

Hello **Retro Gamer**
Loved the article regarding *Dizzy*, however I have noticed that once again the CBM 64 version of *Kwik Snax* has been overlooked, as it is a different game altogether than both the identical Speccy and Amstrad versions. I think it really should have some attention given to it, it would also be interesting to know why Codemasters released a different game for the C64 version.
Paul Staniforth



» [ZX81] *Flight Simulator* is the name of the game, but is it king of the genre? A list feature could reveal all…

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It's always easy to forget when one version is a bit different, but we'll keep this in mind for a future piece. We might leave it for a while though, as we've had a feast of Codemasters recently and even some *Kwik Snax* might prove a bite more than we can handle!

DESTINATION UNKNOWN

Hey **RG**,

I've had a long love affair with your mag, with each issue making me feel warm and fuzzy. Recently, though, it's started to leave me a bit cold. I feel like the balance has swung in favour of older or lesser-known games. Sure there are exceptions, and obviously what I think is obscure is another reader's hidden gem, but still. I want to see more big games: the cover stars of *Mean Machines* and *C&VG*, the Christmas blockbusters and the heavy-hitters. And I'd love to see more coverage of the 32-bit, 64-bit and 128-bit generations. You've hinted at this in the past, but if anything there feels like less coverage than ever.

Am I imagining this change in direction, or is it a conscious shift? Fingers crossed that you've got plenty more in store for me, and that this beautiful love affair can continue.

All the best,

Martin Harrison

With dozens of formats and many thousands of games to cover, making Retro Gamer is a delightfully tricky balancing act, and sometimes a particular issue or even run of issues will leave individual readers a little cold. However, there hasn't been any conscious shift in the magazine's approach, and we've been trying to strike the same balance as usual.

The issue of lesser-known games is a great example of this. We've covered many of the big hitters on the 8-bit and 16-bit platforms, and while there's some scope to visit major releases and series thanks to the growth in our readership over the years, we've also got to consider those who have been with us since the beginning. We can't exclude those older formats, so sometimes we'll feature games that weren't chart-toppers.

As for games from the 3D generations, if anything we've been bolder about featuring them. Prior to 2016, cover features on anything from the PlayStation era or later were rare. In the past year we've put *Super Mario 64, Tomb Raider, Resident Evil, Rogue Squadron* and *Virtua Fighter* on the cover, and we even put a PS2 game on the cover for the first time ever last issue. Make no mistake, while we might not have had as much recent retro as you'd have liked, we've embraced those machines and coverage of them is here to stay.

Hopefully the coming issues will be more to your liking!



» [PS2] Don't expect the PS2 generation to dominate any issues soon, but it isn't going to be neglected.



From the forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

Which gaming world record would you be most likely to obtain?

kiwimike
Probably none! I enjoy games but very average at most, **** at others! Old arcaders *Gyruss* and Time Pilot with a bit of practice would be my best bet I think.

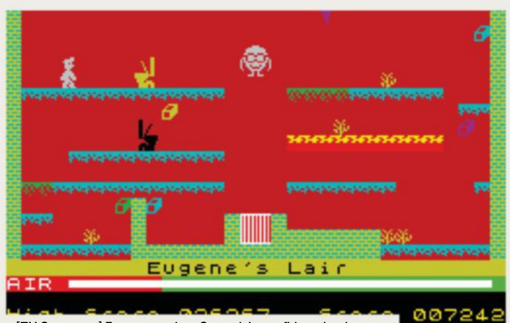
The Laird
A few years back I actually won the Atari Jaguar High Score competition on Atari Age and still hold the records for *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story* and *Missile Command 3D* among others.

deKay
If I summon up my past self, I reckon I'd be able to pull off this record: Highest score reached on *Bubble Bobble* on the Master System, without using a controller but instead using a pair of pliers to short the necessary pins on the joypad port. Bit specialist, I know, but I once reached the first boss doing this.

Negative Creep
Greatest number of deaths by shotgun in any *Gears Of War* multiplayer game.

ncf1
I reckon I could get pretty close on some of those Pinball Arcade machines. Although *NBA2K17* I've stated to become quite formidable on, I reckon.

DRS
I'm confident, with enough attempts, I can win 15-0 against anyone on the original *Pong*. An unbeatable world record. Bring it.



» [ZX Spectrum] Forum member, Sputryk is confident that he can beat the current record for *Manic Miner*.

TheDude18
Silkworm (C64 Version) - Number of levels completed using the Jeep. I'd pick the jeep in two-player games even though most people would pick the chopper. I just liked extra gameplay mechanic of aiming the gun on the jeep and got rather good at it.

stvd
I held a World Record on Twin Galaxies for the last four years. I showed it to someone at work last month and it had been beaten. Twice. When I say beaten, I mean smashed. It was an absolute chore trying to set it in the first place. I know I'll never regain it.

Sputryk
Manic Miner on the Spectrum. High score. Am quite confident that, once 'in the zone' I can outpoint Simon Bickerdike's efforts, all of which are registered on Twin Galaxies.

retro GAMER

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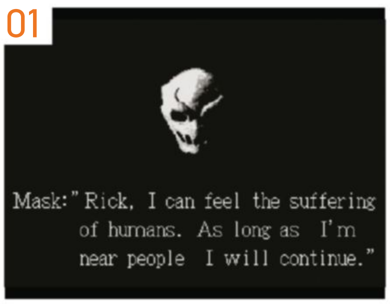
ENDGAME



SPLATTERHOUSE 3

» It's been five years since the events of Splatterhouse 2, and Rick has married Jennifer, had a son and turned himself into a Wall Street success story. Unfortunately, his son's untapped psychic power attracts the attention of the Evil One, and this time it's Rick's own mansion that is invaded by hideous creatures. Can Rick save both the world and his family? Let's skip to the end and find out...

01



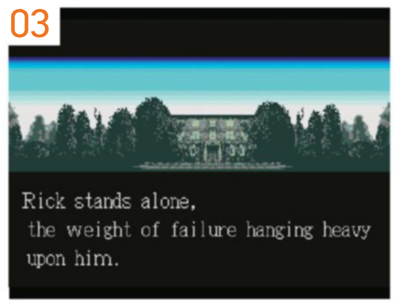
» Rick has managed to remove the Terror Mask, but it has an ominous message for him. It looks like he can never run, nor hide, from the curse that is carried within this otherwise unassuming piece of facial wear.

02



» After a night of unspeakable horrors, Rick has at least sent the demonic forces back into retreat. Dawn breaks over Rick's mansion, which is a type of house that he really should have avoided purchasing given his personal history.

03



» Though Rick survived the battle, there is no triumphant celebration because this is no victory. The Evil One might have had his plans foiled, but that wasn't the outcome that Rick was fighting for. His goals were more personal...

04



» Specifically, Rick wanted to save the lives of his wife, Jennifer, and son, David – but with Hell itself trying to stop him, it was a task too great for even the bearer of the Terror Mask. Jennifer was devoured from the inside by a boreworm, and David was sacrificed in a dark ritual.

05



» Congratulations for what, Namco? Rick is a broken man. His wife is dead. His son is dead. He knows that he'll never escape the curse of the Terror Mask. With no hope of a peaceful life, all he can wish for is death. That's worthy of congratulations now? We're disgusted.

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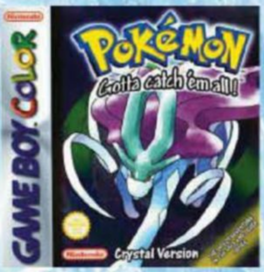




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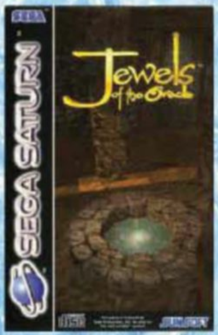
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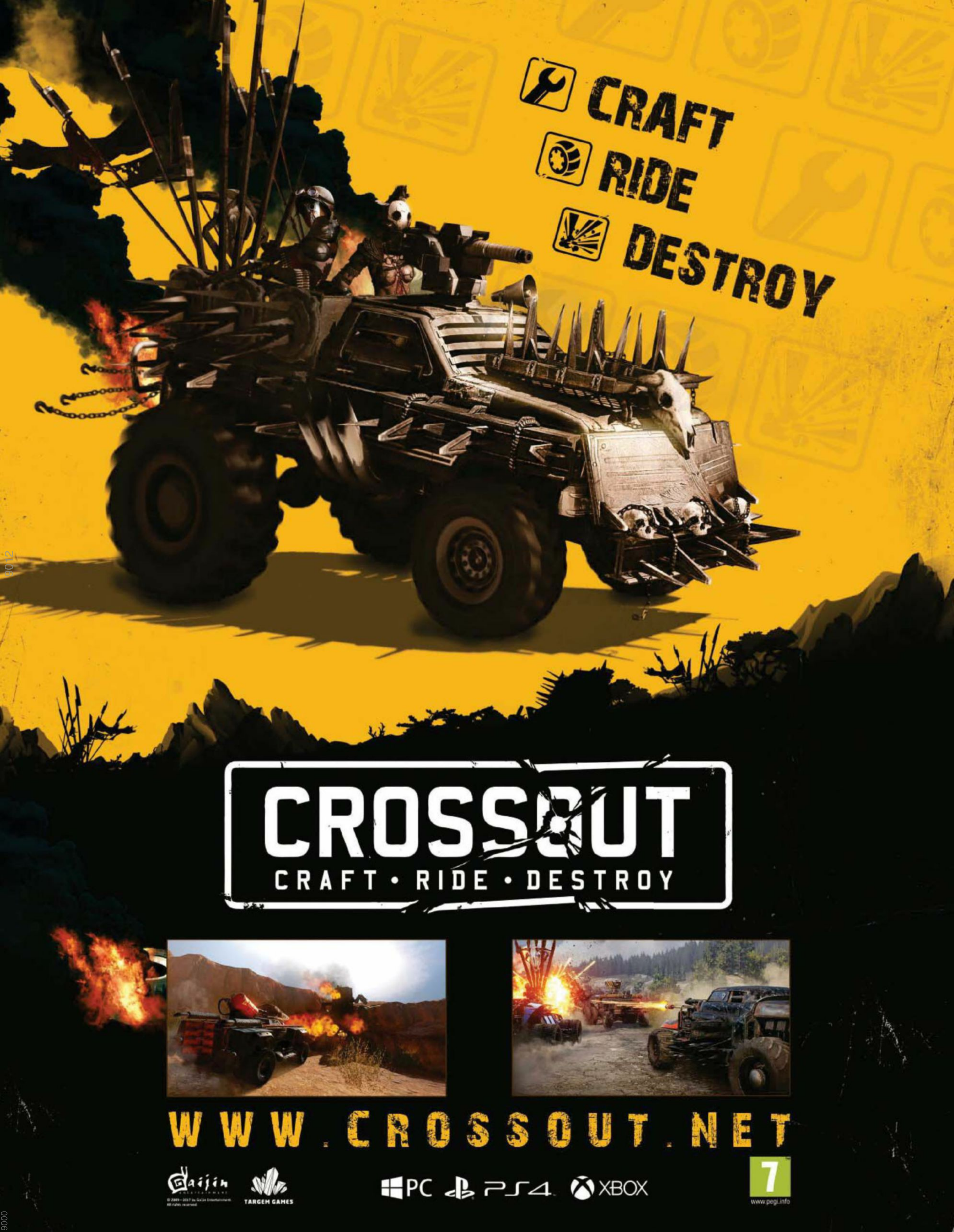


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